CHINA, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTEST:

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT ON NETWORKS OF

SCREENS AND STREETS

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation advances a networked approach to social movements via the study of contemporary environmental protests in China. Specifically, I examine anti-paraxylene protests that occurred in 2007 in Xiamen, in 2011 in Dalian, and in 2014 in Maoming via news reports, social media feeds, and conversations with witnesses and participants in the protests. In so doing, I contribute two important concepts for social movement scholars. The first is the treatment of protests as *forces majeure* that disrupt networks and force the renegotiation of relationships. This turn helps scholars to trace the movement of the social via changes in human consciousness as well as changes in relationships. The second concept I advance is *wild public networks,* which take seriously new media as making possible different forms of protest. This concept is especially important in studies of social movement in China where censorship and surveillance are widespread. By advancing these two concepts, I offer scholars new tools to trace the movement of the social beyond instrumental successes in terms of relationships and renegotiations.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In 2014, as I was preparing to go abroad to China and begin collecting research for this dissertation, I contacted one of my Chinese friends studying in Beijing to tell him I would be on his campus for the summer and asked him to meet. He told me he was not able to do so because he was in the hospital. When I asked why, he told me he had been diagnosed with throat cancer and he was undergoing surgery to fix it. My friend had not yet even graduated college. He seemed far too young to have throat cancer, but was handling it frighteningly well. When we finally met a few weeks later, I asked him if he knew what caused his cancer. He very matter of factly answered that it was because of the polluted water in his hometown. Over half his family had the same kind of cancer. Luckily, it was easy to treat. They just removed part of his throat and kept him on a liquid diet until he healed.

A little over a year later, in the midst of writing the last chapter of this dissertation, one of my closest contacts in China sent me pictures of Shanghai from his Weixin social media account. When I asked him why he was in Shanghai, he told me he was accompanying his dad to the doctor. His dad had stomach cancer and no one in his village was capable of diagnosing and treating it, so he had to travel to a bigger city with better hospitals and doctors who specialized in cancer treatment. “Do you know what the

cause is?" I asked. "Environmental pollution," he answered, "because of the chemical pollution." This cancer was not so easily curable and would require weeks of treatment and surgery. He told me that since a chemical plant moved into his village in 2009, many people were diagnosed with the same kind of cancer. He sent me pictures of black rain pooling on the streets and speckling the cars.

This is a refrain across China. Entire villages are afflicted with the same types of cancer. It has become frighteningly commonplace. People are losing their fathers, their mothers, and their only children. They are losing their land to garbage and runoff, and they are losing native species of plants and animals that are also struggling to find clean water and food. The relationship networks that constitute their lives are being interrupted as people pass away prematurely. Loss on this scale makes old ways of living and making do impossible. These are the stakes for the Chinese people today.

In this type of climate, protest has come to be the only way some people can force their governments to listen. Protests, especially violent protests, draw attention to the issues at hand while embarrassing local governments who cannot keep the peace. The advent of social media has made these citizen-led protests possible on larger scales and helped to take officials to task. People across China are protesting against chemical plants, garbage incinerators, molybdenum processing plants, and wastewater pipelines and being thrown in jail and silenced. But sometimes they are also winning. As these wins build up, citizens are beginning to renegotiate their relationships with officials. The work of this dissertation is to trace these changes, to map the movement of the social and the changes to relationships.

China's environmental crisis is incredibly complicated. It is not simply a battle

between the victimized citizens and the big bad government. Rather, China's environmental crisis would be better described as a series of overlapping networks that have converged to create a crisis, which is in constant transition and negotiation. This is why I approach China's environmental movement from a networked perspective that investigates and traces relationships. I turn to history to consider how Mao Zedong's treatment of nature altered people's relationship with the land, which then impacted people's attitudes toward environmentalism. I look to changing political policies to trace how Deng Xiaoping's decentralization of power post-Mao created a climate ripe for further exploitation of the environment in pursuit of GDP growth. I explore the networks of environmentalism that emerged in response to the degradation of the land, water, and air alongside ancient and contemporary notions of civic duty. I also turn to cellphone, social media, and Internet networks to follow flows of data and information in the form of images, text messages, video, and microblog posts as they bounce across wild public screens (DeLuca, Brunner, & Sun, 2016).

I have chosen to focus on protests, in particular, in this dissertation for several reasons. First, to date, protests in China have been largely understudied and undertheorized. Much of this likely has to do with the decentralized nature of protests. They are not planned very far in advance, there is no leader, and they often are singular events, meaning that they do not occur as a series of protests over a span of months or years. Thus, to predict when one would happen where would be a difficult task. Second, protestors are not only difficult to find, but often reluctant to talk with people about their participation for fear that they will be punished by government officials. Third, protests in China are incredibly wild and unpredictable. They arise, seemingly out of nowhere

(though not for no cause), and automatic and human censors often erase traces of their occurrence from the Internet. What is left is scattered and fragmented remains.

These difficulties may explain why scholars of China's environmental movement often turn to Environmental NonGovernmental Organizations (ENGOs) (Gao, 2013; Lee, Plambeck, & Yatsko, 2012; Tang & Zhan, 2008; Yang, 2005; Zhan & Tang, 2013). While these studies make important contributions to scholarship, with between 250 and 500 protests occurring in China each day (Human Rights Watch, 2013), scholars would be remiss not to pay more attention to these eruptions that are altering relationships between the people and their government. Furthermore, while ENGOs perform important research, collaborate with the government regarding select policies, and raise awareness,

> Chinese ENGOs are still limited in their capacities, as they (1) lack resources to act independently and influentially, such as financial support, a knowledge and information infrastructure, social recognition, and a large constituency, and (2) are restricted in their freedom to act under the current political and legal system in China. (Xie & Mol, 2006, p. 70)

Though much has changed since Xie and Mol wrote this chapter in 2006, much has also remained the same. At the same time ENGOs are strengthening their ties with the government and the people and being awarded more funding, they are also subject to the whims of the central government, often forcing them into vulnerable positions financially, as is evident in the 2015 proposal to restrict foreign donations to Chinese NGOs. This topic, which is also incredibly complex, warrants its own book; however, studies of ENGOs provide only a partial picture. We must also examine protest.

Before going further, I want to address how I, as a foreign researcher, went about overcoming the aforementioned boundaries I identified. First, I am unable to conduct research by participating in protests because they are largely spontaneous. Should I be

privy to them in advance and attend them, I would risk losing access to China (i.e., I would likely be denied a visa for reentry to China). To study protests, I look at news reports in both Chinese and English language outlets, images, blogs, and social media feeds. I also draw from interviews with participants in the protests, which brings me to my second point—how I am able to gain access to protestors.

As a White female, I immediately read as a foreigner in China and many people (outside of ENGO employees) have been reluctant to talk with me because they suspect I am a reporter. Thus, I have had to utilize my *guanxi* networks to be vetted as an academic and *not* a reporter. My Chinese colleagues have been able to attest to the goals of my research and assure interviewees that the information they disclose will be used only in academic research. In cases in which I have encountered scheduling conflicts, I have turned to Chinese colleagues in the communication field to conduct interviews for me. Each interview is anonymized and only identified by the location of the protest in which they participated. The participants' genders have also been anonymized and any identifying information has been removed.

Finally, I have had to deal extensively with censorship. According to news reports and interviewees, censorship practices were deployed during the protests examined herein, which have made finding social media posts and blogs more difficult. Fortunately, many savvy and hyperaware protestors saved the images they encountered during the protests and reuploaded them to foreign social media feeds and/or crossposted their comments from platforms like Weibo to Twitter to keep a record of what transpired. The existence and pervasiveness of censorship also forced me to change my tactics to also examine not what *was* there, but what was *missing* (Latour, 2007; Wander, 1984). This

led me to find and examine leaked documents with orders from the government to delete certain words, phrases, or discussions and look to lists netizens compiled regarding what words were censored when. In each case study, I trace a tangled web of missing words and vibrant photos, of violent videos and government directives, of cacophony and silence.

Summaries

In Chapter Two, "The History of Environmentalism in China," I trace the history of environmental protest in China beginning in the 18th century through the Mao years and China's reformation to illustrate that China's environmental movement is driven by 1) a confrontation with environmental crises that were leaving many human and nonhuman animals sick and dying and 2) a sense of responsibility toward the local and national community, what people refer to as *gongmin yiwu,* or civic duty. As such, environmental movements are able to draw massive crowds that give local governments no other choice than to respond.

In this chapter, I also trace the rise of ENGOs in China in relationship to policy changes and shifts in global power relations. Delving into the emerging ENGO landscape, I explore how organizations formed relationships with the media to raise awareness and, eventually, cull support for opposition to projects that threatened human and nonhuman environments. Due to the limits on ENGOs, however, they have not been able to take the same extreme measures that protestors do. Thus, the government enforced restrictions on ENGOs may have contributed to these citizen eruptions.

By looking at how environmental activists—both ENGOs and citizens—have utilized

the tools available to them including mass media press and then blogs, bulletin board systems (BBSs), cell phones, and social media, I am able to trace how the environmental movement has changed with the everchanging media landscape. Thus, one function of this chapter is to set the stage for my analysis of the use of social media in environmental activism across China and how different media make possible different forms of protest.

Using a combination of scholarship from communication and sociology, I identify the binaries that have shackled social movement scholars for decades in Chapter Three including rational/irrational, order/disorder, online/offline, reason/affect, and success/failure and trace their impacts. I argue that the terrain upon which social movements are occurring has changed with the introduction of the Internet, social media, and smartphones, and scholars must adapt our practices. China offers fruitful case studies because 1) it experiences between 250 and 500 protest per day and is therefore an active site of social movements, 2) these events are occurring outside a political system that sanctions protest and 3) with over 650 million Internet users, the Chinese people are conducting these protests on a panmediated landscape.

Weaving together poststructuralist theories from Bruno Latour, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari with communication scholar Michael McGee and sociologist James Jasper, I propose a theory of *wild public networks* to advance the following: 1) the importance of examining protests in terms of the movement of the social, 2) the need to address dynamism and movement in the study of social *move*ment, and 3) the need to move past the binaries that have structured social movement scholarship. In so doing, I make a shift from studying individuals or organizations to studying interactions and networks. The case studies I examine trace changing discourses, censorship practices, relationships, and

flows of information.

Chapter Four extends the work of Chapter Three by further theorizing *wild public networks,* which weaves together forces—of affective appeals and rational arguments—rather than binarizing them. This networked approach, which emphasizes movement and wildness, helps scholars to consider protests as the eruption of amorphous networks that grow and transform while also transforming political processes, physical spaces, and ecologies of thought, method, societies, and movement.

In 2007, protests erupted in the coastal resort town of Xiamen, China, and these events serve as the basis for Chapter Five. People marched in the streets for 2 days against a proposed paraxylene (PX) chemical factory to be built in their city. In the face of this public opposition, the government hurriedly postponed plans for the plant and after months of ensuing debate, public opinion hearings, and environmental impact statements, the plans for the plant were cancelled.

Looking to the 2007 anti PX protests in Xiamen, China, I trace how various dynamic assemblages functioned to foment a protest that would impact the country's contemporary environmental movement. These assemblages include the political/academic/economic assemblage that connected scientists to real estate agents, the global/digital media assemblage that linked netizens and citizens via burgeoning online networks and widespread mobile phone use, and the environmental crisis/civic duty assemblage, which tethers the practice of sacrificing on a personal level to benefit the common good with environmental awareness. Together, their varied movement and trajectories coalesce to form protests, which I term a *force majeure* because they have the capacity to disrupt corruption networks and encourage new enactments of citizenship

capable of empowering local communities across China.

This term, *force majeure,* first helps to capture change, movement, and becoming (a la Deleuze and Guattari), which are an integral part of what is happening in China. Second, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *force majeure* is both "irresistible" and "overwhelming." This concept is important to contemplating networks, which have constructed pathways for this tsunami of opposition to disrupt corruption, stir pressure from Beijing, and physically move a plant. Third, the term helps to privilege force, or relationships between two actants rather than the actants themselves.

By examining Xiamen as a *force majeure* rather than a protest initiated by rational groups of environmentalists, I explore a new way of studying social movements that presupposes neither democracy nor rationality. This model moves away from linear progressions and promises no particular end result. What it does focus on is the conglomeration of forces, or assemblages, that coalesced to move people to the streets, which moved the government to back down, which inspired others to also fight against corruption using China's environmental laws in cities across China.

In Chapter Six, I look to the masses of people that showed up in Dalian to protest the operation of an existing PX plant located on their shoreline in 2011. The protests appeared to be a big success. After only hours of demonstrating, the mayor stood atop a police van with a megaphone and announced to the crowd the plant would be shut down and moved elsewhere. News of the event spread across the country via social media, and with it came hope that other towns could follow the precedent set by the people of Dalian. However, when I spoke to protestors involved, disappointment sat heavy in the air. The mayor never carried out his promise to the people. They told me the plant did not

even shut down for a week and was never moved. Their mayor had lied to them.

The shortage of PX in China made this factory incredibly important to businesses all along the oil processing chain, a network difficult to disrupt. The fact that it was already built meant that a relocation would cost the company far too much money to justify. Many Chinese people outside Dalian, however, never heard about this part of the story, meaning that the story of Dalian remained a story of hope. This was partially due to the censorship apparatuses in place. News of the story flew across social media as events were unfolding in real time. Onlookers witnessed the crowds, the chanting, the arrests, and the mayor submitting to the people on their smartphones, iPads, and computer screens. They cheered their fellow citizens as they watched from afar. The local paper pronounced the peoples' victory; however, shortly after the protests, news of the event was censored, which meant that follow up stories never made it into the papers or social media. Rather than dousing hopes, the fragmented story spread to other towns as a success story, which inspired many in Maoming to protest violently against plans for a PX plant when they came to their town.

By 2014, when the Maoming protests erupted, anti PX protests had become rather common and local officials across China were prepared to deal with them, which Chapter Seven explores in depth. They knew they needed to shut down social media, stifle the opposition, and, if need be, announce they would cancel plans for the plant to appease protestors. So when people began gathering at the capitol building and marching through the streets in Maoming, the government quickly censored terms on Weibo and shut down social media channels. This did not, however, stop the protests. People deployed a multitude of creative practices to avoid censorship. Rumors of police beatings drew

crowds of onlookers to the street, exacerbating the situation.

Protestors burned police stations, threw water bottles at enforcement officers brought in from nearby cities, and kept coming to the streets. Unlike Xiamen and Dalian's protests, the Maoming protests lasted an entire week and were marked by violence and destruction. Documentation of the event may have been stalled by the government's attempts to shut down lines of communication, but creative users were able to circumvent these, and those patient enough to wait until the events were over could then share what had unfolded over Weibo, blogs, and BBSs.

When asked why they participated in the protests, interviewees responded by saying they were inspired by the successes in Xiamen and Dalian and felt they, too, could defeat plans for the PX plant. They were also acutely aware of the corruption that plagued their local government, as dozens of officials had recently been expunged on graft charges. The protests were dually motivated by fear of pollution and the widespread corruption that had infiltrated the area. Believing they could succeed as others had, especially with environmental justifications on their side, the people of Maoming attacked fraudulent officials and demanded they listen. They interrupted networks of corruption. When local officials finally caved to the people, the people demanded that their submission be in writing, disseminated over social media, and posted to the government website. These channels would not only serve as proof to the people of Maoming, but to officials in Beijing and onlookers from around the country.

Together, these three case studies help to chart changing protests alongside the proliferating social media platforms and how activists have changed and adapted their practices to circumvent censorship and organize opposition. They also trace the

transformation and expansion of protests from environmental protests to protests that also address corruption and a growing dissatisfaction with government practices. As a result, we can witness how, in the wake of these protests, networks shift and are interrupted to make space for new forms of civic engagement.

Conclusion

The conflicts in China, the rapid change and growth, the shifting and growing networks all create spaces of contention and contradiction. One of the major incongruities found in Chinese policies and practices is that which lies between the push for rapid economic growth alongside the demand for environmentally friendly practices—the very contradiction that has helped to foment the protests in Xiamen, Dalian, Maoming, and elsewhere. This competition is often discussed in win/loss terms, as if one will prevail and the other fail. This dissertation argues otherwise. Within this space of *maodun*, or *contradiction*, exists complex networks—of hostilities and competing interests, corruption and a sense of civic duty, new media and old relations to the land—that do not necessarily lead to triumphs and failures, but eruptions that create space for new configurations and relationships. Beyond good or bad, these new spaces open opportunities for alternative practices. Within them, hope that new relationships will bring cleaner land, air, and water can be cultivated, but no promises exist.

CHAPTER TWO

A SHORT HISTORY OF ENVIRONMENTALISM IN CHINA

In 1737, under the Qianlong emperor, China's first recorded environmental protest occurred. One hundred and eight residents in the Huqiu hill district outside of Suzhou signed and submitted a petition to their local officials that detailed the offenses of a local dyeing factory. According to the paperwork, the villagers believed the factory was polluting their water supply, which was in turn killing their crops, rendering the water unsuitable for making tea, and causing general health problems. In the list of offenses, the villagers also added that they were "outraged" their "celebrated religious beauty spot [was] being treated with such disrespect" (Dunstan, 1998, p. 699). Authorities responded by having a previously stated prohibition on dyeing carved in stone (rather than written on paper).

These villagers, in no way, were environmentalists as we think of them today, for the word *nature* had not yet even been introduced in the Chinese language. Not until the twentieth century did the Chinese develop a word that mirrored the Western notion of *nature* as a world separate from humanity, meaning that these people likely saw land, the cosmos, and humans as part of an interrelated system rather than nature as an "other." The people from this small village were fighting against a polluting dyeing factory because it was responsible for the rapid deterioration of their systems—their food crops,

water supply, and religious site.

Similarly, people in China today are realizing that any environmental pollution contaminates their bodies through the air, water, and land, which are all intimately intertwined in a continuous flow. Thus, when they are fighting against dangerous chemical factories, dyeing industries, garbage incinerators, wastewater pipelines, and other polluting industries, they are fighting for the environment and themselves and all that flows between them. To better understand environmental protests today in China, a brief trip through historical events is warranted. As will be explained in the following chapter, a networked approach necessitates attention to historical factors. Furthermore, this foray into history offers a changing portrait of social movements that will serve as a contrast to contemporary social movements, which are deeply intertwined with social media. I will begin this chapter by describing the environmental changes brought about by various human interventions from dynastic times to the present.

Environmental Shifts in Imperial Times: A Series of Crises

Over China's thousands of years of history, the environment has influenced and been influenced by each dynasty in a complex system of droughts, trade routes, agriculture, floods, wars, delicate ecosystems, disease, and so on. Different political and economic circumstances, in particular, are densely bound up with both environmental sustainability and degradation. In the following overview, I will discuss how various political and economic regimes have impacted China's landscape and ecosystems by transforming diverse ecologies into monocultures before delving into China's contemporary turn to environmental awareness and advocacy, which signifies a marked turn to more diverse

landscapes, ideas, and practices. I will begin by turning back to dynastic times before engaging more closely with the Mao era.

According to Marks (2012), "China's environmental history is a story of the simplification of environments, peoples, and institutions" in which biodiversity shrank substantially (p. 7). This movement towards a more streamlined monoculture culminated in the Mao Era. Though many factors came into play, centuries of promoting agricultural expansion and the concomitant deforestation of massive tracts of land is one culprit, which sacrificed ecologically diverse forests for fields of single crops like rice and wheat.[i] The second major factor was the attempt to control waterways through dikes, dams, and levees—an effort that promulgated both floods and droughts and inadvertently harmed the local wildlife. The third factor that resulted in an ecological imbalance was the overpopulation of China, which sacrificed delicate ecologies for human expansion. The final factor that created a dangerous imbalance for China was the reglobalization of the economy, the shift to capitalism, and the subsequent export of resources to other countries.

Agricultural Expansion

The expansion of agriculture into China's grasslands during Han colonization marked the beginning of what would become a centuries long battle with desertification (Marks, 2012). The decimation of this northern habitat combined with the introduction of irrigation systems ensured that the grasslands would never recover and ultimately turn instead into desert. China's trade pathways established during this era encouraged farmers to turn more land over to agriculture to cultivate whichever crops demanded the

highest prices at market, which only exacerbated the problem. Massive livestock populations that grazed on fields likely prevented abandoned farmland from growing back into forests (Marks, 2012).

As of 1000 CE, China's Northern plain had been almost entirely converted into farmland, and biodiversity was on the decline. During the Ming dynasty, the importation of New World food crops made exploitation of further tracts of land, including subtropical forests and highlands, possible (Marks, 2012, pp. 205-206). Maize, potatoes, and sweet potatoes made their way to China via sea trade routes and spread all over the land during the Qing dynasty. They were followed by the import of nutrient dense foods including peanuts, tomatoes, chilies, and guavas, which allowed for the population explosion that would take place in subsequent years (Albala, 2011). The massive deforestation that occurred to make way for all these new crops exacerbated the droughts caused by the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO), resulting in millions of deaths due to starvation (Marks, 2012, p. 255).

When Mao came into power and began what Shapiro (2001) calls a "war against nature," the forests were already struggling. However, rather than afforesting the area, many of the remaining trees were decimated in the name of "progress." Mao's successor, Deng Xiaoping, instituted policies that inadvertently worsened the situation. When he gave peasants the freedom to build their own houses, between 1981 and 1985, 195 million cubic meters of forest were consumed for housing construction. Between 1979 and 1986, an estimated "19 million acres of arable land were lost under the combined assault of soil erosion, urbanization, and industrialization" (Jing, 2010, p. 144). This trend did not change after Deng's death. By 2000, over 25% of China's landmass was

considered to be a desert—an increase of 10% from 1993. According to experts, this number is constantly growing and, as Williams (2002) makes clear, there is "nearly universal consensus attributing desert expansion in China to human behavior" (p. 15).

Redirecting Waterways

In addition to sacrificing forests and grasslands for agriculture, the attempts to control rivers by building dikes, dams, and diversions also led to a number of environmental issues, including massive flooding and droughts. During the Song dynasty, the redirection of the Yellow River in 1194 CE to a more southern course had repercussions that lasted well into the 1800s. The dry riverbeds of sand in the North combine to form sandstorms that have "plagued the region for nine centuries" and make living and farming in this region difficult (Marks, 2012, p. 155).

The excess of dikes on Dongting Lake in the eighteenth century combined with increased deforestation led to extensive flooding, with 18 noteworthy floods afflicting the surrounding area between 1831 and 1879 (Marks, 2012). Despite the problems stemming from dam building, the Chinese government remained undeterred in its expansion of dam projects and embarked upon new initiatives with little to no regard for the river or land that surrounded it. This led to multiple catastrophes, including the disasters that followed the 1962 damming of the Yellow River. In spite of expert advice against building a dam on a river with such a high silt content, the project was approved and completed. Shortly thereafter, the generators were rendered useless by the silt and the city of Xian was flooded. However, dammania persisted and by 1990, all except two of China's rivers had been dammed for a total of 83,387 dams (Marks, 2012).

The Three Gorges Dam, the world's largest and China's largest engineering feat, forced human relocation and the likely extinction of numerous plant and animal species. According to Wu, Huang, Han, Xie, and Gao (2003), this type of "habitat fragmentation, including both the reduction in habitat area and the alteration of its spatial configuration, has been generally recognized as the primary cause of loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services" (p. 1239). After it was built, the area suffered landslides as well as the collapse of riverbanks. This rush to hydropower has been largely government driven and has lacked important input from those with divergent views (Mertha, 2010), thereby isolating the decision-making process in an information monoculture spearheaded by the interests of government officials.

Overpopulation

The third move that resulted in environmental degradation was a drastic increase in the human population, which impacted the plant and animal diversity across China and continues to do so to this day. Between 1000 BCE and 300 CE, the country's population increased from five to sixty million. This population growth was accompanied by an ethnic genocide in which smaller minorities were defeated and replaced with Han people and practices. For example, the movement of the Han people to the south of China forced out many minorities who lived in the area. The practices the Han brought with them, such as agriculture and silver mining, wreaked havoc on the delicate ecosystems that had been maintained through centuries of adaptive practices by local peoples. As Marks writes, "What had once been a diverse human and natural environment in north China has radically been simplified" (p. 101).

As human populations increased without regard for the land's limitations, people experienced land shortage and scarcity. Between 1750 and 1950, the population expanded from 225 to 580 million. Plots of fertile soil had to be divided into smaller and smaller pieces with the doubling of the population every generation, which meant people had to make do with less land (Marks, 2012, p. 221). This also impacted peasant's ability to make a living as farmers and increased the amount of waste being produced.

In recent years, the population increase has led to human encroachment on lands that had never before seen humans. People brought industrialization along with them, and air, soil, and water pollution levels skyrocketed. This pollution did not limit itself to impacting humans, but also threatened the existence of numerous species, ultimately leading to the rapid decline of plant and animal diversity. As of 2014, 420 officially protected endangered species were located in China (Li, 2014), and as early as 2011, scientists estimated that 70-80% of the country's plant species were threatened (Marks, 2012, p. 293). Today, the pangolin, which is considered to be a food delicacy, and the golden coin turtle, which is used for medicinal purposes, are in severe danger of extinction (Li, 2014). This, as well as the rapid decline of other species, is a crisis local and international NGOs have been feverishly working to address.

In addition to decimating nonhuman populations, subsequent population bursts including the population boom resulting from Mao's directive to have large families (which will be discussed in more detail below) ended in famine and nutrient-deprived landscapes. Bigger families did mean a larger workforce, but such a large workforce could not be sustained by an already suffering countryside. Without attention to the limits of the land, leaders were doomed to fail.

The Resource Exodus

Finally, the development of an increasingly globalized trade system created a flow of resources from China to the outside world. Beginning with the Silk Road as early as the second century BCE, tea, silk, and spices were migrating from China to the Middle East and Europe. Over the years as trade flourished and China also began exporting porcelain, timber, and precious metals, this translated to enormous economic benefits for China, but also to deforestation, overuse of lands, and monocultures. For example, when European and U.S. demand for *ephedra sinica* (a drug to treat asthma and common colds as well as a diet pill) grew in 2000, the over cultivation of the plant led to the depletion of ground cover as well as further desertification (Marks, 2012).

China's list of exports has grown and shifted over time, with diverse repercussions for different parts of China. The demand for precious metals such as copper and silver has increased mining efforts, which are notorious for destroying land and polluting the surrounding areas. This trend towards mining has risen in recent times. As of 2015, China controls approximately 95% of the world's rare earth metal production and half of its reserves, which are used in electronic devices (Yan, 2015).

Hints of Environmental Discourses

In the midst of repeated sacrifices of nature's complex ecosystems in favor of human "progress" and expansion is also woven a discourse that has what we would call today in the West *environmentalist overtones*. As early as 250 BCE, there is evidence that the Chinese literate classes were aware of the limits of their resources. A book published that year titled *Guanzi,* "expresses awareness that natural resources are limited, and that a

successful state should have a ruler who puts limits on their exploitation so that resources are not exhausted" (Marks, 2012, p. 71).

The increasing separation of humans from their environment impacted their perception of the world and their relationship with the land. In the Tang dynasty (618-907CE) as human civilization flourished, people began to remark upon their "separation from nature [which was] enforced by city life" (Marks, 2012, p. 164). With cities and walls came a pointed separation of people from the larger landscape, a change happening again in China today as people are moving from rural to urban areas in astonishing numbers. This separation ultimately leads to a more limited understanding of the complexity of ecosystems and the limitations of the land and represents a reordering of relationships.

With this separation of people from their land, however, also came a variety of preservation efforts. For example, in the 1600s, a Henan Province official proposed a "massive reforestation program to address some of the devastation wreaked by the late Ming rebellions" (Economy, 2010, p. 43). Those in charge were beginning to realize the value of trees in preventing erosion. In the early 1700s, the people of Hangzhou showed a "widespread awareness of the value of trees, bamboo, and perennial crops" and their ability to prevent erosion (Osborne, 1998, p. 222). At the same time, officials put into place severe penalties for exploiting the area's shared land.

Though these efforts illustrate recognition of the importance of ecosystems, they were more often than not met with resistance by those more interested in short-term profits and political power. Despite the awareness of the interconnectedness of humans, plants, lakes, water, animals, weather, and desertification, tensions between ecological systems and

political and economic systems persisted. During the Mao years, these issues were exacerbated as Mao encouraged people to conceive of themselves as superior to the land and life that surrounded them, as I will detail below.

The Mao Years

The Mao Years represented a more concentrated and well-documented assault on nature and, thus, deserve greater attention. In the early 1900s, China was in political and economic ruin. The series of imperial invasions by European countries left the country devastated, with no leader to pick up the pieces. Corruption ran rampant and an underground network of warlords ran many areas of the country. China was in desperate need of rebuilding, but none of the imperialist invaders were willing to assist China, believing it to be too costly an investment.[ii] Sun Yatsen and the Guomindang arose as one of the potential leaders, but Mao Zedong, who rose as an alternative, met their efforts with resistance and finally defeated the Guomindang with the power of the peasantry, eventually forcing them to retreat to Taiwan. Under Mao, the country was finally largely united, but the land they inherited was beset with problems.

Once Mao was in power, the series of campaigns he led did nothing to undo the degradation he inherited. Rather, his policies pulled the country into decades of revolution that exacerbated an unsustainable burden on the environment. At the same time, he also discouraged and disregarded the opinions and cautions of scientists who could have minimized the devastation that ensued. Headstrong and determined, Mao proclaimed that “Man’s ability to know and change Nature is unlimited” (Shapiro, 2001, p. 68). This approach resulted in the silencing of many scientists who disagreed. Those

who did speak up were often sent to the countryside for reeducation so that they too could embrace the idea that willpower and the efforts of the people could make most anything possible.

This disregard for science and turn to willpower as the way is evident in Mao's retelling of the "Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains." In this short story that many young students during the Maoist era were required to memorize, the "foolish old man" from a small town set his mind on leveling two mountains using only a bucket. Many were skeptical of this man, deeming him foolish for attempting such a ridiculous feat, but the man kept at the task with dogged persistence, eventually achieving what others had considered impossible bucket by bucket. This tale was meant to inspire Chinese peasants across the country to persist in the face of tremendous challenges as well as imminent failure. This story and "[t]he spirit of the Foolish Old Man...was credited with transforming Chinese landscapes by inspiring backbreaking physical sacrifices and communal effort" (Shapiro, 2001, p. 103).

Mao's Mangled Effort at Industrialization

With science out the window, Mao embarked upon projects shrouded in revolution that had many unforeseen impacts on China's ecosystems. In 1958, he launched the Great Leap Forward (1958-1960), for which the "defining characteristic was speed" (Shapiro, 2001, p. 71). Mao wanted to catch up to and surpass the U.S. and Europe in terms of industrialization and believed that it could be accomplished in a completely unrealistic period of time that was perpetually being shortened. The Great Leap Forward began with a series of irrigation projects that resulted in mass relocations of populations and the loss

of arable land. This was followed by the "backyard furnace" campaign, which destroyed useful household products and produced 10,700,000 tons of worthless metal (Shapiro, 2001).

1958 also marked the year that Mao attempted to increase agricultural production beyond reasonable goals. Without the input of scientists, whose knowledge could have helped prevent the catastrophes that would follow, people began planting crops too close together, overusing fertilizers, and expanding agriculture into the grasslands. As cities and provinces across China competed for the biggest yields, increasingly unsustainable methods were employed and the "grain choked, failed to grow, and rotted" (Shapiro, 2001, p. 77).

On top of these efforts was layered yet another nationwide directive to eradicate the "four pests"—flies, mosquitos, rats, and sparrows. The people obeyed and, unfortunately, carried out the campaign with great success. People across the country would follow the sparrows every evening to their roosting places outside of town and bang pots and bans to prevent them from landing. The birds would literally drop out of the sky, dead due to exhaustion. Only after the sparrow population reached near extinction did Mao and the people realize the gravity of the directive. In the aftermath of the movement, people noticed that their crops were being eaten by pests—the very pests the sparrows had been consuming before they were slaughtered. The sparrow eventually shed the title of "pest" and was reinstated as a bird worthy of painting and poetry. The shifts in networks, fortunately for the sparrows, had a rather swift impact on human food systems.

In the wake of irresponsible farming practices and the annihilation of certain species, the Great Famine ensued. Desperate, people across the country descended upon

remaining reserves of food, animals, and resources. They scoured the land for anything they could eat, including tree bark, roots, rats, and seeds, generating an even more barren countryside.

Mao's Mission to Restructure the Land

In an effort to raise the country out of this terrible catastrophe and back on the road to independence and progress while also revitalizing his political clout, Mao launched the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), which concentrated on increasing domestic production of crops as well as revenue. The major problem with this effort was twofold. First, the emphasis on universal models of agriculture in a country with an incredibly varied terrain meant that local topography and climates were completely ignored. Failures proliferated. The second major problem was the forced relocation of 16 million young comrades to the countryside. The transplanted youth were completely ignorant of local farming practices as well as the importance of local lakes, streams, flora, and fauna in the functioning of ecosystems. They merely carried out the plans they were told to enact, which wrecked many habitats.

During this initiative, mountainsides across the country were terraced in an attempt to grow crops on their slopes. This tactic was termed "Dazhai-inspired agriculture" and was a method taken from a small village that had figured out how to make use of their gradual slopes to farm crops using a very labor intensive system. However, this method was not suitable for universal application for a variety of reasons, including climate, topographic, and soil variances.

At the same time, wetlands and lakes were filled in with soil to expand farming land

by armies of citizens. Grazing fields were turned into grain farms. The outcome was intensified soil erosion on mountains, an abundance of land too saturated with water to plant crops, and a loss of the grasslands essential for sustaining livestock. However, Mao and his loyalists would accept no excuses for failure of these methods. People who doubted the universal agricultural models put forward by Mao were seen as traitors. Many of these traitors were scientists were publicly shamed and delegitimized. As a result, science became an enemy of sorts that was replaced by blind nationalism.

Unbridled Deforestation

The Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution each had extremely detrimental impacts on the land and waterways in China, from which it has yet to recover. In addition to the devastation discussed, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution functioned in tandem with the Reform Era to deforest the nation in what Marks (2012) calls the "three great cuttings." The Great Leap Forward's backyard furnaces devoured trees to fuel the fires that ended up producing only useless hunks of metal. During the Cultural Revolution, mountains were deforested in the name of Dazhai inspired agriculture. This model of agriculture resulted more often than not in soil erosion in places where the mountains were too steep or the climate too cold. Finally, with the change of power during the Reform Era came further timber consumption via logging for housing materials. As people moved from communal living quarters to individual housing, forests were downed en masse for new homes.

Mao's Mission to Expand the Population

Another major problem that arose during Mao's regime was population growth. Throughout his tenure, Mao promoted human reproduction, insisting that if the country had more people, China's road to industrialization and modernization would be swifter. Mao also believed that a larger population would contribute to China's military power and make it more resilient to foreign threats, including the US. He did this in spite of his advisor Ma Yinchu's advice against it, who warned that unchecked population growth would actually impede the country's development.

The first issue Mao faced after promoting a population explosion was the Great Famine. China's population grew to a size the land simply could not support, especially in the face of the droughts that swept the nation. Tens of thousands of people died. Yet, even after the droughts and famine, Mao continued to promote large families and rampant procreation. The subsequent increase in people led and is still leading to environmental problems. China's one child policy, which was implemented in the late 1970s, attempted to correct the overpopulation problem. Jiang Zemin, one of China's top leaders until 2003, deemed China's massive population its biggest problem, as it can be connected to a variety of persistent environmental, social, and political issues.

Mao Bends to the Limits of the Land

Before long, environmental catastrophes that arose during Mao's regime simply could not be ignored. Mao and his advisors were forced to confront four major issues. One issue was the lack of fertile soil for crops after years of overfarming without sensitivity to the land. In 1972, directly after Nixon visited China, the first commercial deal was struck

between the two countries, and it was for 13 nitrogen-based chemical fertilizer complexes (Marks, 2012). This deal was targeted at increasing domestic food production so China could feed its growing population and stop relying on Russia for assistance. The second catastrophe that occurred was in the coastal city of Dalian (a city that serves as a case study in Chapter Six). The entire bay turned black after untreated industrial waste was dumped into the water, killing marine life and polluting the shoreline. This very visible event demanded attention from officials outside the city. The third crisis was the appearance of tainted fish in the capitol city of Beijing's markets, which drove the issue home to the highest level officials. Finally, the fourth was that the Yellow River, which had been dammed in several places, failed to reach the sea that year.

In response to their domestic crises, China took its first step to reintegrate with the rest of the world. The same year these crises descended upon China—1972—the country joined the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and developed a state-level committee to address environmental issues. This committee was the precursor to today's Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) (Economy, 2010). This move toward a greater focus on their environmental situation was imperative, as the country was being besieged by one environmental crisis after another. In the next section, I will trace a series of disasters and responses that occurred after China's "opening up" to industrialization, capitalism, and foreign influence.

The Environmental Impacts of China's "Opening":

A Rising Culture of Protest

Though Deng Xiaoping's move to a more capitalist economy was met with excitement by much of the world, it would prove to come with its own set of deleterious impacts on the environment. According to Marks (2012), Deng's "developmentalism conceived of nature as a vast reserve to be plundered for human needs," which was not so different than Mao in that both believed "humans could—and should—control nature" (p. 273). The major difference was that Deng would use science to help in his mission, a move that would take "years of post-Mao leadership '...to rehabilitate the stature of the scientific community'" (Marks, 2012, p. 273).

This being said, Deng did attempt to construct a system under which the environment would be taken into greater consideration. In 1979, the first environmental law, called the Environmental Protection Law, was promulgated on a trial basis under his leadership. Under this law, the government tolerated environmental protests, which had previously been a rarity, "so long as they [were] not too disruptive" (Jing, 2010, p. 145). Most of the ensuing protests were dealt with on a local level since Deng's political restructuring moved power from the central government to local authorities, thereby giving them a great deal of autonomy. One of the most remarkable examples is the case of the Dachuan protests, which spanned over a decade.

The Persistent Protests in Dachuan

Dachuan is located in China's northeast Sichuan province, and in the 1970s and 80s was primarily an agricultural area. When a chemical fertilizer factory moved in on the

riverbank and began releasing its wastewater directly into the region's main water source, people began noticing that the river was changing. Not only was it getting wider, but strange substances were pooling on its surface. Once villagers were able to attribute these changes to the factory, a series of protests ensued (Jing, 2010). The first dispute against the company came after a horse and 30 sheep went blind after drinking from the river. The people became acutely aware that their livestock's as well as their own health was at risk. The residents complained directly to the factory, which temporarily assuaged those upset by the pollution by offering some villagers employment. Until then, no one from the area worked at the factory, creating a divide between locals and those who moved in to run the plant.

The second incident that provoked outrage stemmed from the reallocation of land that occurred after agricultural communes were disbanded. Those residents who were given land next to the river quickly found that crops would not grow due to high levels of ammonia, which were easily attributable to the factory. Villagers rose up and voiced their disapproval by blockading the entrance to the factory, thereby preventing any trucks from entering or leaving. Their demands were simple and straightforward—they wanted the factory to provide them with tap water—a demand the factory officials would ultimately satisfy.

The third incident occurred in the wake of population control policies when more attention was paid to women's reproductive capacities. Villagers began realizing that an increasing number of women were having miscarriages and, with the help of doctors, eventually linked it to the pollution in the river. This time, the villagers were not alone. The local Party Boss's wife had suffered numerous miscarriages, which he also attributed

to the chemical plant. He became a leader in the effort to bring clean drinking water to the entire village, a luxury everyone at the plant already had. The villagers demanded that either the factory's top leaders and their families each drink one bottle of polluted water or that the factory pay for access to clean water for the entire village. Factory officials chose the latter.

Protests intensified and became more frequent between the early 1980s, which witnessed only a handful of uprisings, and the early 90s, which saw over 300. During these protests, human health "remained the most contentious issue in each phase of the village's struggle against the factory" (Jing, 2010, p. 148). In 1996, one of the largest and most offensive protests took place after a flood broke the bridge over the river, which had to be extended after the factory's wastewater caused the river to widen. The enraged villagers marched to the entrance of the factory and, again, asked factory officials to come out and talk to them. They wanted the officials and their families to drink the water they had brought from the tainted river. When officials refused to do either, the villagers brought several trucks loaded with water from the river and used hoses to pump the contaminated water over the factory walls. After 10 days of being barraged with contaminated river water, the officials finally agreed to give Dachuan 150,000 yuan to build a bridge and provide an alternative and safe water source for 600 people (Jing, 2010).

Over the course of the decade of protests, villagers became increasingly more informed about the dangers of water pollution as well as their rights and the methods they could employ to protect themselves, their families, land, and livelihoods. Unlike later protests, they went directly to the factory, bypassing any local laws or procedures. With

each new tragedy came new tactics for dealing with the polluting factory and people also obtained new knowledge about the country's environmental laws. Together, these protests show how

> Chinese villagers can become instant political activists when their livelihood is threatened....These protests are not meant to save an endangered environment for its own sake....Rather, they are aimed at seeking social justice to prevent the ecological basis of human existence. (Jing, 2010, p. 159)

With or without environmentalism, these people will still fight for environmental causes. They are not a niche group, but the masses fighting for their lives.

By the end of the 1980s, the central government had founded China's Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP). The fact that China was facing massive environmental challenges was warrant for constructing a special department devoted to addressing environmental concerns. Moreover, the central authorities were well aware that environmental degradation and disasters were accompanied by social and economic losses that could hurt their national GDP.

With the development of a formal department tasked with dealing with the environment came the training of lawyers and judges on environmental laws and issues beginning in the 1990s (Economy, 2010, p. 20). This movement toward public responsibility for collective resources was crucial as social welfare programs declined and support from the central government was withdrawn. People began taking these issues into their own hands and public participation in environmental protection increased dramatically.

One marker of this rise in public participation was the founding of ENGOs. Established in 1994, Friends of Nature (FON) became China's first formal ENGO, and paved the way for the thousands of ENGOs to come after it. Its mission was to increase

popular participation in environmental issues. The climate it entered was nurturing and open in that the government was permitting media investigations of pollution and infractions as a means of increasing awareness, investment, and participation. The government also supported grassroots efforts, which were seen as a way of involving the public in taking responsibility for the collective. Though the government did not want protests to take place or "social unrest" to occur, they were looking to the masses for help in solving their ever evolving environmental conundrums.

Just over a decade after FON was founded, in 2006, 354,000 NGOs were officially registered, but "if one attempt[ed] to account for NGOs that [were] not registered with the government, the number by some accounts [was] as high as eight million" (Economy, 2010, p. 137). Just 3 years later, the official number of registered organizations had risen to 414,614 (Gao, 2013). As of 2014, of the registered NGOs, over 3,500 of them were considered to be environmental NGOs (Wang, 2014), with many more operating unofficially as grassroots organizations or as registered businesses (a practice that allows organizers to sidestep registering with the government).

The Huai River Runs Black

In addition to being the year that saw China's first ENGO, 1994 also marked the year that the Huai River literally turned black after factories along its banks released untreated waste, killing 26 million pounds of fish and rendering the water undrinkable (Economy, 2010). This posed a problem to all the villages that drew from the Huai for drinking water. The media, now encouraged to report on such incidents, arrived on the scene to gather information. Rather than confront the problem, the local authorities attempted to

cover up the incident and, in response, the incensed villagers pelted officials with eggs. With the story now exposed on various media channels, the central government was alerted of the incident and quickly became involved. Local officials were told they would be fired if they did not stop the pollution and clean up the river. As a result, a reported 1,000 factories were either shut down or relocated (Economy, 2010). This incident helps to illustrate how the government's changing attitude toward pollution impacted the lives of citizens and how media would be used to garner support.

In the following years, people took it upon themselves to seek various means of educating the general population about the environment and environmental issues moved from the local to the national. For example, Liao Xiaoyi (also known as Sheri Liao) established the Global Village of Beijing, and with it a show called *Time for the Environment,* which aired 300 episodes on CCTV between 1996 and 2001. She also produced numerous documentaries aimed at increasing awareness and action. According to Economy (2010), Liao is, in part, responsible for the media becoming "an essential element of environmental activism in China" (p. 171). Numerous activists have followed and expanded the path Liao forged by not only turning to television and documentaries, but also radio stations and regular press conferences with reporters. In the following chapters, we will further discuss how the use of various forms of media is central to China's environmental movement. As the situation has become more complicated, the methods for demanding change have grown in complexity and creativity in tandem.

The Yangtze River Flood and Subsequent Environmental Initiatives

The increased environmental awareness promoted by people like Liao Xiaoyi, Wang Yongchen (the director of Green Earth volunteers), and Liang Congjie (founder of Friends of Nature) helped to move away from the monoculture of thought Mao promoted. Rather than issuing single unilateral edicts, the government was welcoming a more diverse array of voices. Citizen leaders were valued for their ability to conduct research and spread information. Scientists were, again, regarded as a respected resource, especially for addressing environmental issues. Thus, when the Yangtze River flooded in 1998, killing more than 3,000 people and destroying five million homes, the government called in experts to examine the disaster. This was one of the largest floods on record, and there were numerous reasons beyond heavy rain that contributed to the flood's intensity (Chen & Li, 2005). First, the flooding caused 61 breaches of dykes, dams, and levees that had been built along the river. Second, the massive depletion of lakes as well as the construction of floodgates between tributaries and lakes gave the floodwaters nowhere else to go but downstream, worsening the flood. Third, the straightening of rivers caused silt to build up much more quickly than it did when the river took a more meandering path, which led to higher water levels. Fourth, over the years, the surrounding areas underwent massive deforestation that led to further erosion in a river already heavy with silt. This last reason—deforestation—was the first to be discovered and prompted the government to act quickly.

The very same year of the floods, the State Forestry Administration launched the Natural Forest Conservation Project, which was aimed at restoring forests and further prohibiting logging over 18 provinces and autonomous regions around the Yellow and

Yangtze Rivers. This extensive effort included conservation efforts, the retraining of those in the logging industry for other jobs, the conversion of farmland to forests, and the development of sustainable farming of mushrooms and ferns within the forests (Ma, 2008). As a result of these efforts, timber harvests from China's natural forests dropped from 32 million square meters to 14 million between 1997 and 2000 (Ma, 2008).

Environmental efforts and rights continued to expand. 1998 also marked the founding of the Center for Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims (CLAPV), a nonprofit organization that provides legal counsel to pollution victims via a telephone hotline. It was founded and is managed by environmental law professors from the China University of Political Science and Law. People can call in for initial legal advice and some receive direct help from the organization in the litigation process. Between 2002 and 2010, the hotline received over 10,000 complaints, a number far too great for it to handle. Though limited, to date, the organization has been an important resource for those whose lives have been adversely affected by pollution, but who do not have the time or financial wherewithal to independently bring a lawsuit against companies that have their own lawyers and much larger cash reserves.

Further government initiatives that year included the Zero Hour Operation of 1998, which required plants that could not meet discharge standards to shut down. This effort was focused on the Huai River and resulted in the shut down of at least 500 paper mills, which were notorious for their dumping habits. This campaign also involved the media, so as to draw more attention to the issues at hand. According to Becker (2000), "the *China Youth Daily* published a photograph of a desperate 60-year-old peasant kneeling in front of Xie Zhenhua, director of the National Environmental Protection Agency,

pleading him to save the livelihood of fisherman" imperiled by the dangerous discharge factories were releasing into the river in which they fished (p. 84). This moving picture portrayed the dire nature of the issue.

The plan was repeated in 1999, and this time the media also played an important part in drawing attention to the persistent pollution and its impact on those who depended upon it for water, crops, fish, and livestock. The *Southern China Morning Post* reported that an employee, under the direction of his supervisor, dumped "six tonnes of chemical waste containing benzene, napthalene, indolene and pyridine" that formed "a black glutinous mixture so corrosive it killed all the fish in nearby streams and burned the latex gloves of the investigators" in Zhejiang province (Becker, 1999, para. 4). After a public search, the pair was eventually caught and arrested making them the first people in China to be brought in front of court in an industrial pollution case. Though the results of the Zero Outcome campaign were mixed in terms of stopping wastewater dumping,[iii] they arguably increased public awareness of water pollution via reports of the project as well as the lawsuit in state sanctioned newspapers.

Building Discontent: Industrialization and Environmentalism Grow in Tandem

In 2001, the government received 370,000 environmental complaints from citizens, who were aware and upset about what was happening in their homes across the country. This is evidence of a growing awareness of environmental issues as well as people's rights. It is also evidence of the ongoing environmental issues. Despite ENGO and government efforts, the water pollution issue—and the problem of industrial pollution more generally—was not being solved. Part of the reason for this ongoing and expanding

problem is tied to China's rapid industrial growth, which posed (and continues to pose) a challenge to even the most well-supported environmental efforts.

Recognizing the seriousness of the problem as well as China's rising importance as a manufacturing hub, the World Bank signed on in 2002 "to assist in the development of several municipal and enterprise wastewater treatment plants in Anhui and Shandong Provinces to reduce water pollution in the Huai River Basin," which was just one year after China's accession into the WTO (Economy, 2010, p. 8). What had started as a local issue turned into a global matter as people began to realize how important the networks between the east and west were in sustaining the global economy. Increasingly, U.S. and European companies were outsourcing their manufacturing to China, resulting in the increase of Chinese exports to Western countries. To offer an idea of the massive trade imbalance that developed, I offer the following information: in 2001 the value of Chinese imports outweighed U.S. exports to China by $83,096,100,000,000, and the number was growing exponentially (US Census Bureau Foreign Trade Division, 2015). By 2002, the difference had already increased to $103,064,900,000,000 and continued to rise by the billions subsequent years (US Census Bureau Foreign Trade Division, 2015). In 2008, it had risen to $268,039,800,000,000 and then $343,078,800,000,000 in 2014.[iv] This combined outsourcing and dependence on China for goods made a strong case for the World Bank to help China, especially since foreign investors often funded the polluting industries via the supply chain.

With the spread of industrialization came the spread of environmental efforts. In 2003, the central government launched the Environmental Impact Assessment Act, which requires all projects to be assessed for safety and for the project to go up for a period of

public comment before the company is granted permission to commence construction. This law was and is intended to solicit feedback from residents and prevent dangerous projects from being built too close to residential property. Unfortunately, it would take time for the law to spread far enough for people to demand that their officials enact it.

Official laws were complemented by civilian efforts. In 2003, Huo Diashan, a photographer, also established his own NGO to protect the Huai River in the wake of the Zero Hour Operation by making public the impacts pollution was wreaking on the local peoples' health. Other people directed their efforts at preventing dams from being built. For example, Wang Yongchen launched a campaign to stop the construction of the Yangliuhu Dam on the Min River in Sichuan. Environmental disputes were on the rise, with an annual percentage increase that dwarfed China's impressive GDP growth.

In 2004, another law meant to complement the Environmental Impact Assessment Act was launched called the Environmental Protection Administrative Licensing Hearings Provisional Measures. That same year, the Ministry of Environmental Protection reported 51,000 "environmental disputes," and just a year later, the number had grown by 250% to 128,000.

This rapid increase in environmental disputes was creating a sort of social unrest with which the government was deeply uncomfortable. They reacted by attempting to reign in the movement. In 2005, the government launched a crackdown on foreign NGOs ostensibly because they were advancing some sort of Western agenda, but I argue that the reason was more likely tied to an effort to subdue the movement without entirely quashing it. The government simultaneously recognized the importance of the people in environmental efforts, but did not want it to turn into widespread social unrest. That year,

510,000 cases of "public conflict" related to environmental issues occurred—a number that increased at an annual rate of 29% (van Rooij, 2010).

One of the public conflicts that occurred was reason enough to take precautions to tamp down the enthusiasm of the environmental movement. In 2005, Zhejiang Province, which is one of the wealthiest provinces in China, experienced four consecutive large scale environmental protests. One was particularly violent and disruptive.

Mass Uprisings in Zhejiang

Beginning in 1999, the local government began establishing a chemical industrial zone near two small villages in Zhejiang province by providing incentives for companies to build there. As a result, many chemical companies did decide to relocate in the area and by 2005, the industrial zone had flourished; so too had the pollution. The impacts it had on residents was severe and direct. Despite laws against it, some residential villages were located within a mere 1,000 meters of the industrial zone (Ma, 2009). Local officials were prioritizing profit over people.[v] And the people were paying. Their crops were failing, their air was poisoned, and the villagers were tired of being ignored. They had attempted to create change via sanctioned methods—petitions to local officials—but with no success.

Exasperated by officials unwilling to listen to their pleas for over a year, a group of villagers went to meet the mayor directly on Dongyang Mayor Reception Day in March 2005, but were refused. The Mayor did not understand how serious this group was until they erected bamboo tents right in the middle of the road leading to the industrial zone, blocking traffic. Stalwartly, they stood united, unwilling to move for weeks despite

numerous police raids and arrests. In an organized attempt to dismantle the opposition, the government sent 3,500 local police and employees to break up the blockade.

This tactic backfired. In response to the raid, the mass of villagers grew exponentially. An estimated 20,000 to 40,000 villagers gathered, and the protest turned from peaceful to aggressive. Rather than sitting in the streets, they swarmed the nearby chemical plants, leaving behind overturned cars, burning police vehicles, damaged buildings, and government employees fleeing from the scene in their wake. Protestors carried provocative signs expressing their distrust and resentment regarding the situation that read: "Corrupt officials have their pockets full of money, people have their lives full of pain" and "Rich people can buy houses outside the villages, poor people can only wait here for death!" (Ma, 2009, p. 46). Dozens were seriously injured in the aftermath of their anger and the government's resistance.

News of the event spread via mass media and a team of officials from the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) came to investigate the industrial zone. After assessing the situation, the MEP shut down 13 factories including the Dongnong Pesticide factory and punished several local officials. Villagers wary of their officials and their follow through on the MEP's orders refused to take down their tent blockades until they witnessed the machinery being removed from the factories (Ma, 2009). Thanks to the laws in place, the protestors were able not only to hold officials accountable, but also to shut down polluting factories through force.

The event generated a substantial amount of attention from the press. The *Donyang Daily* newspaper reported that over 30 government employees were hospitalized over the course of the protests (Yardley, 2005). The paper also, however, stated that the police

were attempting to break up the protests because "the coming of cold air and dramatic temperature drops threatened the health of feeble old women" (quoted in Yardley, 2005, para. 17). Few locals likely believed this narrative, especially after protest organizers were arrested and jailed for their involvement. International media picked up the story including the *South China Morning Post* and *The New York Times*, reporting the details of the event outside state controlled media outlets. The group, Human Rights in China (HRIC), found that the prosecution of participants went on well after the protests ended. Six members of a local environmental group were detained by officials post protests for their involvement. This attention via mainstream media prompted officials and academics to make and release statements about the protests, which, according to Ma (2009), was very uncommon. The new networks linking environmental laws, mass media, awareness, ENGOs, and outraged people culminated in an act of environmental justice.

Environmental Catastrophes Hit Home for Officials

The laws in place were finally providing the support and traction necessary to punish and shut down polluting industries. However, this was not the only issue the Chinese people confronted. In 2006, an environmental catastrophe hit China's capitol that was the culmination of decades of unchecked deforestation, unsustainable water usage, and rapid desertification. Eight sandstorms hit Beijing, with the one on April 17th dumping 330,000 tons of sand in a single day. NASA images show a band of brown extending far across China and into the adjacent oceans from the Korean peninsula to the Yellow Sea (NASA, 2006).

Despite action to undo the degradation that plagued the nation, problems were

multiplying. The total number of environmental complaints that year exceeded 616,000 (up from 128,000 the prior year). People's awareness was increasing and catastrophes were drawing attention to the direness of the issues at hand. That year, the government introduced yet another complement to the Environmental Impact Statement Act called the Provisional Measures for Public Participation in Environmental Impact Assessment, thereby providing more concrete procedures for citizen involvement and to recruit them in the movement to prevent unchecked industrialization.

Though policies were improving, their implementation was oftentimes not meeting the goals they set out to accomplish. The resulting failures can be attributed to the always increasing conflict between the simultaneous push for GDP growth and an end to environmental degradation. For example, government policies such as the Zero Hour Operation were revealed to be ineffective at improving water quality in the Huai River. In 2008, after years of work and numerous initiatives by ENGOs, government officials, international organizations, and local villagers, the MEP found that over 60% of the river was grade IV or worse, which means it was "unsuitable for drinking, fishing, or, in the worst cases, industry and agriculture" (Economy, 2010, p. 9). The environmental effort in some areas was no match for the industrial factories taking over China in the name of economic growth. Policies were being made, but not implemented, which would eventually lead to further discontent because awareness was spreading. Before long, people's desires for clean resources combined with a love of their home, financial investments in property, and a strong sense of civic duty would emerge to become a force that could blow against the impending pollution plants.

Xiamen, 2007

To this point, I have provided an overview of environmental protests in China that occurred during a massive transition to a more capitalist economy, remarkable GDP growth, a movement of authority from the central government to local officials, a rise in civic organizations such as NGOs, an increased openness in mass media in regard to environmental reporting, the development of environmental policies, the return of science, and a widespread distrust of local officials. This complex network, which was constantly becoming increasingly diverse, made possible protests that changed local landscapes. The Xiamen 2007 anti PX protests would prove to become a force so strong that it reshaped China's environmentalist topography. The major difference would be that these protests occurred on a terrain that included Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs), text messaging, and QQ (a Chinese social media platform), thereby increasing the speed and distance news of the events travelled and allowing it to do so largely unfettered by the restrictions placed on state sanctioned mass media.

In February 2004, the Taiwanese Xianglu Group initiated plans to build a PX plant in the tropical coastal city of Xiamen. Officials, who stood to make a great deal of money from the 10.8 billion RMB project through kickbacks and bonuses, welcomed the plant. This plant was one of seven large scale PX projects to be built in China as part of China's 11th Five Year Plan (2006-2010) (Hung, 2013). Plans for the project were not widely circulated and received no attention until the summer of 2007 when a professor in the Chinese Academy of Science at Xiamen University, Zhao Yufen, who was also a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), began a campaign against the project. She gathered 105 signatures of fellow committee members

on a petition demanding that the project not be built and brought it to the March 2007 meeting of the CPPCC. The justification for the opposition was that the PX plant was being built too close to residential land and, in the event of an accident, could cause major health risks, including cancer and birth defects.

While the petition was under consideration, word of its contents did not appear in any local Xiamen news outlets. However, a story was published in *China Business* (a Beijing based publication), and after being picked up and posted by the well-respected and prolific blogger, Lian Yue, who had seen the story released, news of the plans for the plant began spreading across blogs and forums. This quick spread was possible because Xiamen is in an area of China where many people owned cell phones, had QQ accounts, and had access to computers connected to the Internet in 2007. According to one interviewee, "All of the news concerning PX was online" (personal correspondence, 2015). Since the papers were not covering the issue and local officials had disclosed neither plans nor an Environmental Impact Statement per regulations, people skeptical of their government turned to these forums as their primary source of information. As one interviewee stated, Zhao Yufen was a well-respected professor at Xiamen University and was responsible for the research, so he found the data trustworthy—more trustworthy than their government officials (personal correspondence, 2015).

The blogger Lian Yue showed unflagging devotion to disseminating information about the plant, its impact on the people, the dangers it posed to the town, its opposition, and so forth. By the end of March, Lian Yue was urging residents to "break the information blockade and to save themselves" using a series of measures (Hung, 2013, p. 46). In his 12-item list, he repeatedly urged people to actively spread information about

the plant and the dangers it posed to Xiamen. As the opposition grew in strength, numbers, and fearlessness, local officials began launching a counterattack that involved a series of reports and news releases on mass media that touted the benefits the PX plant would bring to the town. This campaign did little to quell residents' fears and, instead, fomented intense debates. Widespread distrust in local officials meant that people were more likely to trust word of mouth and online forums than state-sanctioned reports.

The PX plant went from complete obscurity to the center of conversations on blogs, chat groups, and neighborhoods in the span of weeks. Online forums were, according to multiple interviewees, very lively and full of debates. This is where people found out about the project, the threats it posed, and information about the scheduled protest. The online discussion groups were also full of fear, outside news reports, rumors, misinformation, and exaggerated scientific assessments. They were by no means the most accurate source of information, but they addressed issues the mass media conveniently left out of their reports.

Woven throughout the discussion was a clear love of Xiamen residents for the place they called home. This was true for those who had lived there their whole life as well as those who moved there from other locations. Interviewees said over and over again that they wanted to protect the place they called home and identified with on a deep level. One interviewee who has lived in Xiamen for almost two decades felt that the PX plant threatened to ruin the life she had in Xiamen. She had already witnessed encroaching pollution and the PX plant seemed like the nail in the coffin that would spoil Xiamen's environment.

In addition to the information found on blogs, an anonymous text message was sent

out and forwarded, making its way to three quarters of Xiamen residents in a remarkably short span of time. This message declared the PX project to be "like an atomic bomb." It also called for a demonstration in the streets on June 1st, 2007. This method of dissemination ensured that those who were not online still received the call to duty. This text message also would become part of a larger online effort that would exemplify

> the utilization of modern information technology in challenging and revising (local) governments' policy agendas, boosting grassroots participation in civic affairs, and holding the government to be more responsive, transparent and accountable. (Hung, 2013, p. 42)

Threat of protest quickly spurred local officials to act. The government was well aware that a mass incident could lead to major problems, and it announced on May 30th—before the protests—that plans for the PX plant would be postponed. The protestors, however, did not disband. In spite of censorship, propaganda, and other related government efforts to disperse the impending movement, people by the thousands showed up in the streets to march for the place where they all lived and were unwilling to back down.

The vast majority of reports of the protest claim that the 10,000 people who gathered were largely peaceful.[vi] People marched with banners, shouted slogans, and wore yellow ribbons. Those standing on the sidelines offered bread and water to those marching in a sign of tacit support. Local police and security officers were very present at the march, directing traffic and standing on the sidelines. One interviewee recounted a story about protestors who were passing around yellow ribbons and also offered them to the police officers who accepted them but said they could not wear them because they were on duty. Some speculate that because the police officers were native Xiameners, they were more sympathetic to the cause. After all, their home was also on the line.

Another interviewee remarked on the heavy police presence, believing it to be part of

the reason why the protest was so peaceful. In addition to the many uniformed officers, plainclothes police officers were also present in the thick of the demonstration. As the march continued from the Lundu Ferry Terminal to Xiamen University, from Si Ming Road to Zhongshan Road, police permitted the thousands of protestors to pass through every intersection. However, many locations where new protestors could join in were sealed. For one interviewee, this level of order made "[t]he government's attitude toward the event...very clear: They were allowing us to express our views, but they didn't want too many people to join the parade" (personal correspondence, 2015). This is corroborated by another interviewee who said that several institutions forbid their employees to join in the protest and Xiamen University warned their students against protesting.

Protests continued from June 1 to June 2. News of the unauthorized uprising spread largely via text messages and online forums with some video streaming, which meant that Beijing officials quickly found out what was happening on China's southeast coast. The opposition ensued online in forums even after bodies left the streets. After weeks of discontent, Xiamen officials declared that plans for the plant would be reassessed and that they would conduct an environmental impact statement (EIS) that would be shared with the people.

When the report finally came out in December of that year, the results were clear: the plant site was too close to residential areas to be considered safe. Either the plant must be moved to a more remote area or the entire residential district had to be relocated. Per the laws on the books, a period of public comment followed and residents were given a chance to voice their concerns and vote on the project. After an overwhelming majority

of citizens and local officials voted against the plant in person and via polls, officials decided the plant would be relocated to the city of Zhangzhou, a smaller town in the same province of Fujian, thereby allowing the province to still benefit from the revenue the plant would bring.

The space of time between the release of the EIS and the decision to relocate the plant was a mere 10 days. In this way, an authoritarian government has the potential to act as an asset to environmentalism, as it can issue directives and carry them out quickly. The lack of deliberation makes changes easier to make. This stands in stark contrast to protests such as the Keystone XL protests, which went on for several years before President Obama signed the act to stop construction.

Disseminating Hope and Propagating an Allegiance to Civic Duty

In the years following, the Xiamen success story spread across the country, inciting others to unite in the tens of thousands against similar projects proposed for their homes. News of it travelled on blogs, forums, and eventually social media beyond QQ like Weibo and Weixin. Though the "media's political role [in China] has long been that of an agent of stability, charged with the political task of helping to preserve sociopolitical order, particularly during times of crisis," social media were not charged with such an agenda; instead, social media were capable of taking on the role of "an alternative source of information and opinion that is readily available online rather than through the mainstream or traditional media outlets" (Hung, 2013, p. 43). People across the country became increasingly informed about their rights as well as the procedures local governments were required to follow. They felt empowered by these laws and took

action. Over the course of reviewing Chinese blogs about the protests, most included detailed discussions of peoples' rights and relevant laws. With the expansion of new forms of social media to connect people across the country as well as the proliferation of a more diverse ecology of information, opinions, and ideas, so too came the expansion of outrage and protest.

According to interviewees as well as data collected from social media, the 2011 anti-PX protests in Dalian were inspired by the 2007 Xiamen protests. The same can be said for the three 2013 anti PX protests in Ningbo, Chengdu, and Kunming. The people of Maoming also found the same encouragement from the Xiamen "success," and in 2014 violently protested against the proposed PX projects for over a week (Lee & Ho, 2014). In 2015, Shanghai residents gathered in the streets in response to murmurings that a PX plant was going to move into their industrial park. The victory in Xiamen, as well as the perceived successes of the cities that followed in Xiamen's footsteps, provided inspiration for Shanghai protestors' illegal gathering (Wen, 2015). As a result of this resistance, China is facing a PX shortage because it simply cannot find places to build the plants due to the massive resistance by people in cities across the country.

The impact of Xiamen's success does not stop with PX plants, but has also inspired others to protest against waste incinerators, wastewater pipelines, and other dangerous chemical factories.[vii] These protests are one component of a growing body of evidence that "[c]ollective action and protests have been quite successful....even when the protestors themselves were beaten up, arrested or prosecuted, [their actions] did create stronger law enforcement and direct pressure on polluting companies to meet the protestors' demands" (van Rooij, 2010, p. 75). These protests were more palatable than,

for example, antigovernment demonstrations because people were not attacking the state and demanding a replacement—they were demanding that the rules on the books be followed, that the policies put forward by the central government be obeyed, and that the procedures in place be carried out as directed. In the process, the people were creating pockets of pure democracy in which the people spoke and leaders listened.

The difference between the Xiamen protest (and those that followed it) and protests that came before a widespread adoption of the Internet and mobile communication technologies is the speed with which they erupted and speed of local officials in addressing citizen concerns. In Xiamen, officials announced before the protests even started that they would reconsider the project. In Dalian, the mayor stood on top of a car and told the people the PX plant operating in the area would be shut down hours after people gathered. In Qidong, people protesting against a wastewater pipeline were able to convince officials to cancel the project within 5 hours. Rather than investing months, years, or decades of petitions and protests as was the case in prior protests, these movements materialize quickly into a force that compels many officials to bend to the tsunami of anger, outrage, and attention almost immediately.

The distance news of each outburst traverses also impacts the success of the protest. For example, in the case of Xiamen, news of Zhao Yufen's opposition was reported in a Beijing-based newspaper but not any local outlets. The blogger, Lian Yue, was able to move news from Beijing to Xiamen with just a few clicks and share it with an entire online population who then moved the information from BBSs to QQ, cell phones, and streetside conversations. As people checked their cell phones and conversed with neighbors, the information spread quickly. Once the outrage over the dangers of the PX

plant was organized into an assemblage of protestors, the news ricocheted back to Beijing, where officials put pressure on the Xiamen government to follow procedures and address the issue. Social media and online forums gave people a network by which to share information and support from afar that was essential in putting enough pressure on local officials to act.

As the ability to share information across vast tracts of space quickly increases, the environmental movement is given the space to grow. People are quickly acquiring new tools, methods, and rights to confront the pollution that arrives at their front doors and threatens the place they call home. As the number of environmental offenses continues to grow, so too does the movement; the more widespread the pollution, the more widespread the protests, which are only exacerbated by corrupt officials who attempt to ignore the requests of the people. As van Rooij (2010) points out, "when government institutions fail to respond to citizen demands, the situation can [and often does] escalate to a point where citizens take matters into their own hands" (p. 67) and create a public spectacle over far reaching and fast moving networks that demands democratic processes.

Obstacles and Grounds for Hope

The environmental movement in China is quite complex and in a constant state of movement and change. At the same time policies are made to help people prevent the relocation of polluting factories to their homes, they are also undermining others. For example, in 2005, after several successful class action suits were brought against careless and irresponsible factories, China's Supreme Court gave courts the ability to break up class action suits into smaller lawsuits. This move placed further financial burden on

those making the claim (who are often of a lower socioeconomic status), thereby making it less likely that the case is either brought or seen through to an end (van Rooij, 2010).

Other actions have been taken in response to the growing number of protests, which have piqued the government's concern over the possibility of widespread social unrest. Although environmental activism is the most tolerated form of activism in the country, the government does not want to lose control and, as a result, will use different measures to reign in the unrest including censorship, propaganda campaigns, and even physical violence.

This move to control also extends to the work of ENGOs. Just as officials attempted to restrict the power of foreign NGOs in 2005, in 2014, the world witnessed a similar tactic being enacted once again. The central government began considering policies that would "regulate" foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) by "step[ping] up supervision of the fast-growing sector" (Blanchard, 2014, para. 1). This happened in response to the protests in Hong Kong, "which Beijing attributed to hostile foreign forces" (Panda, 2014, para. 4).

However, at the same time, the government is also encouraging government/ENGO collaboration. Among other initiatives, in late 2014, the government held a conference with local and regional ENGOs in Beijing to solicit input for policies they were developing. This meeting included both registered and unregistered ENGOs. According to one interviewee who attended the conference, the government wants to work with ENGOs because they can help to analyze data on a variety of topics ranging from industrial pollution output to public interest. The government then uses this data to develop more effective policies at the national and international level.

At the same time the government is making legal action more difficult for some, the record of wins for citizens in environmental cases gives grounds for hope. According the van Rooij's (2010) study, "of the 66 court cases about pollution found in the legal database consulted [for the study], 43 were won by citizens, showing that courts have ruled in favor of pollution victims and against polluters" (p. 66). In addition, in January of 2015, the central government passed a law granting ENGOs the ability to sue polluting factories. Since many ENGOs have staff members who are scientists, lawyers, and engineers or have access to such experts, they have the ability to collect and analyze data that hold industries accountable for their emissions and dumping.

Perhaps the most promising new report is the one the State Council released in 2015, which states that "officials whose decisions are found to have caused ecological damage....would be held responsible for their 'lifetime'" (Li, 2015, para. 1–2). This signals a major shift in local politics. Whereas previously, local officials were given bonuses and promotions for increasing industry and local GDP, this law privileges the environment, stating that no officials known to have caused environmental degradation would receive promotions. This move, according to "*People's Daily*, the Communist Party's official mouthpiece" was intended to encourage "'ecological civilisation' [as] a political task for party cadres and government officials" (Li, 2015, para. 7).

Lines of Flight

As these seemingly contradictory moves illustrate, China's environmental movement, like all social movements, is not taking a simple linear course in which one step logically leads to the next on a road with a definitive end. Rather, China's path is clearly erratic

and each event that appears to be a "success"—the signing of a law or closing down of a factory—is tainted with "failures"—the lack of enforcement or the movement of said factory to a smaller and more vulnerable city. However, events considered to be "failures" are also often great "successes" in terms of raising awareness, spreading information, inciting people to form new ENGOs, and so forth.

In this dissertation, I do not want to treat social movement in terms of successes or failures, for any event is both at once. What I want to do is trace the lines of flight of a movement via Deleuze and Guattari (1987). This is a not about a linear progression, but, like the path of a butterfly, erratic movement. The lines of flight I follow will not be straight and one cannot think of movements as progressions, but networks of trade, ecosystems, politics, pollution, cancers, fish, PX, environmental impact statements, housing prices, and localisms that pull and tug the network into an ever-moving mass of connections that make certain things possible and others hopeless. For example, BBSs, QQ, and text messaging made the Xiamen anti-PX protests possible, which in turn shifted the configuration of the network to create flows of legal and scientific information that empowered those in Maoming to fight against the PX plant proposed for their town, but cancelling the PX plant in Xiamen meant that Zhangzhou became its new home against residents' wishes. Each case study in this dissertation examines the impact of social media by tracing shifting networks that make use of the tools at hand to twist, expand, and subvert various networks and what I am most interested in is tracing the *movements* that result.

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[i] And during the Cultural Revolution, rubber trees.

[ii] This was especially true for Britain, who had invested a great deal of capitol into East India with little return.

[iii] For example, though the National Environmental Protection Agency's Xie Zhenhua, proclaimed the Huai River cleanup a success, *Worker's Daily* refuted this assessment, claiming the river was still severely polluted (E. C. Economy, 2010, p. 7)

[iv] For the sake of comparison, in 1995, the trade imbalance was at $6,000,000,000.

[v] This trend was not, however, unilateral. In 2001, the party secretary, Wang Wei, refused to sign a land use contract with the Dongnong Pesticide Company because the company had already developed a reputation for such bad pollution that it drove other villages to relocate.

[vi] According to one protestor, after the march ended, pictures of violence appeared online, but they were only rumors that were ultimately deleted.

[vii] Social media has played a crucial role as it is a means by which people can act as decentered knots of news-making that are not state-sanctioned or controlled. China's elaborate censorship system is mind-boggling at best, with multiple levels of censoring that sometimes seem to evade common sense logic. For example, King et al. (2013) found that while sensitive topics including critiques of government officials are often banned, many are still allowed to exist. According to their finds, a post's propensity to stir a mass uprising is one of the main criteria for deciding whether something should be censored, not just the content. Yes, many words are automatically censored, as is pornography and hate-speech, but creative users are often able to circumvent these more simplistic devices using homonyms, images, and walkie-talkie functions, which are remarkably more difficult to delete with automatic devices. With well over 650 million online users, the sheer number of posts and the speed at which they travel create a constantly growing mountain of data to comb for sensitive content.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORIZING SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Scholars from across disciplines have been studying social movements from different perspectives for decades and each has made important contributions to the larger body of scholarship by working to consider different persuasive forces in sociology, expand definitions of what constitutes a social movement in communication, provide broader frameworks for analyses in history, and trace them alongside systems of governance, economies, and social systems in political science. I ground my studies in communication and the rhetoric of social movements because communication is the medium by which networks are formed, maintained, and extended. The rhetorical exchanges that occur within networks animate people, organizations, groups, and governments, which is why I define social movements as the complex coalescing of collective networks that, through various forms of communication, open up alternative ways of being in the world.

Focusing on these networks is especially relevant in an era in which complex linkages are extending further, traversing transnational borders, and leaping across cultural boundaries via the paths forged by social media. Within these congested and crisscrossing pathways, (mis)information, anger, images, and appeals travel at an unprecedented speed, allowing space for flash mobs, riots, and protests seemingly to erupt spontaneously. Moreover, since their widespread adoption and use, social media

have played a key role in social movements across the world including the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, and thousands of environmental protests across China. The landscape of protests and social movements has, once again, changed and so too must the methods scholars use to study them.

Contemporary mediascapes are now subject to different speeds and trajectories of information flows made possible by smartphones, laptops, iPads, and apps that form a cacophonous jumble of panmediated networks (DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, 2012). The world in which people reside today is not one in which online and offline worlds are separate, but a panmediated environment in which Google searches and conversations, dating and websites, and drones and war are messy, tangled, and indistinguishable from one another (Brunner, 2014; DeLuca et al., 2012).

Most people are connected to this complex web of networks. The United Nations reported in 2014 that there are 6.8 billion mobile phone subscriptions in a world of seven billion people, meaning that most of the world's population has access to a mobile phone (United Nations Division for Public Administration and Development Management, 2014). Research has shown that Internet users are highly likely to engage in some form of social media. In a 2014 study, the Pew Research Center reported that 74% of online adults in the U.S. use social networking sites (2014) and that, as of 2012, 66% of those users had participated in civic or political activities using social media (Rainie, Smith, Schlozman, Brady, & Verba, 2012). Chinese people, too, have adopted social media on a large scale, with three quarters of the population regularly active on some type of social media platform, making them the most socially engaged country in the world in 2012, with some studies showing 99% of Internet users in China using some kind of social

media by 2015 (GlobalWebIndex, 2012; Kemp, 2015). Between 2000 and 2014, Chinese Internet users grew from 22.5 million to in excess of 640 million; this number more than doubles the 280 million Internet users in the U.S. In 2015, Weibo reported 198 million monthly active users, a number that Weixin (or WeChat) dwarfs with 500 million active monthly users (Bischoff, 2015; Millward, 2015).

This level of panmediation provides fertile ground for the proliferation of communication across networks as well as the extension and collision of networks. Within these collisions and extensions in which people are connecting to one another more easily and quickly lie new spaces for the emergence of grassroots movements. Take, for example, the networks of onlookers, family members, government officials, and fellow fraught citizens that collided after a desperate Tunisian fruit vendor by the name of Mohammed Bouazizi self-immolated in front of a government building in the city of Sidi Bouzid and sparked protests across the country and then the Arab world. Information spread rapidly via text messages, image messages, and social media platforms, documenting the violence and anger. Outrage again incited movement across intertwined networks in the U.S. after violence occurred during the Occupy Wall Street movements. Social media platforms made possible a new flow of images and video of Anthony Bologna's violent pepper spraying of innocent protestors in New York spread proof of the incident from multiple angles. This event helped to launch the Occupy Wall Street protests into the media spotlight, which helped turn political discussions toward issues of income inequality in the U.S. Several years later in Hong Kong, protestors thwarted censorship (though not surveillance) attempts by moving their communication to FireChat, an application that allows users in close physical proximity to communicate

using Bluetooth rather than Internet connections. Within these new spaces have erupted new forms of protest and the explosion of networks begs a different approach to social movements—a networked approach.

Moving to a more networked approach in the study of social movements provides scholars with important advantages over more traditional methods that emphasize formal organizations and hierarchies. First, network inspired theories offer a means by which to incorporate social media in a more seamless fashion, as one of the many networks that links people rather than treating it as a separate world that stands in contrast to "real life." Second, a network-centered perspective offers a productive approach to grassroots efforts and mass protests that are not organized by formal organizations. Increasingly, people across the globe are mobilizing the masses from the middle and choosing to move away from hierarchical models. This is very apparent in the Occupy movement, which refused to appoint a leader or a cohesive list of demands. Rather, people emphasized inclusivity, which was evident in the choice to label protestors as part of the 99%. This is not to say that organizations do not take part, but that they are not the leaders of many contemporary movements. Third, networked approaches supply the space to acknowledge organizations and other hierarchies within the larger network. Importantly, moving to a networked approach does not preclude the existence of hierarchies. There are always "knots of arborescence in rhizomes, and rhizomatic offshoots in roots" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 20). ENGOs such as 350.org and Global Village, for example, which tend to have more formal and hierarchical configurations, are microstructures within larger moving networks.

Social media give a means by which to maintain, extend, and strengthen global media

networks outside official discourses, which overlap, extend, and augment local and national networks, connecting protestors in Tunisia to journalists in the U.S., peppersprayed women in New York to students at the University of California Davis, and protestors in Xiamen to national officials in Beijing. As a result, the routes and flows of information are changing in dramatic and important ways and now people in Maoming, China are able to reach officials in Beijing and angry citizens in Tunisia are able to reach reporters in New York. Local officials who once operated in relative privacy are being exposed on national and international levels, creating a situation wherein an immense amount of pressure is placed on local officials to act in accordance with a new set of standards as the whole world watches.

Moving Social Movements

What factors help shape these protests? For one, the decaying architecture of various systems. Most countries have developed systems to prevent and handle citizen grievances. In the U.S., people unhappy with proposed policies are able to submit petitions, make phone calls to government officials, and apply for a permit for peaceful protest. In China, many of the same apparatuses exist—people can apply for a permit to protest, submit petitions and grievances, and call hotlines to report environmental abuses. These systems, however, which are designed to control dissent and enforce civility, often do not succeed, and citizens from all countries who are infuriated with the failure of the existing processes end up resorting to uncivil behavior in the form of unsanctioned protests often punctuated with anger and violence.

Witness the 1999 Seattle protests in which protestors took to the streets en masse and

punctured storefronts to punctuate their protests or the more recent protests in Ferguson, Missouri, where stores were set ablaze and gunshots fired. The Arab Spring protests were ignited by a fruit vendor's self immolation and violence continued to characterize demonstrations, including one in Egypt during which a woman was dragged across the pavement, partially disrobed to reveal her blue bra, and then beaten by police officers, which provoked more outrage. Protests in China also often become violent as desperate residents fight with everything they have against the construction of dangerous chemical factories and wastewater pipelines. Images and videos of people fighting physically back against police ran rampant during protests in Hangzhou against a waste incinerator. The failure of systems begets responses steeped in a stew of frustration and anger.

The prevalence of violence, creative resistances, and seemingly irrational behavior in protests necessitates that they be considered in studies of social movements, which cannot be understood otherwise. The group that calls themselves Anonymous, for instance, cannot be understood within a strictly rational paradigm. How they choose whom to hack, expose, and DDoS does not always align neatly with ethical and moral standards, and the legal and security systems in place are ill-equipped to deal with their tactics. Groups like Femen use topless activists to disseminate their feminist messages, which are challenging to understand within a rational model. The force of nonrational arguments are also apparent in the 2007 Xiamen protests, during which residents gathered to oppose the construction of a chemical plant after a message alleging that the plant would have the same consequences on the town as dropping an atomic bomb—a sensationalist and unsupported appeal—was disseminated. Research in communication and sociology has been struggling with how and to what degree nonrational forms of

protest should be considered since the Civil Rights, Women's, and environmental movements in the 1960s and 70s. These movements, which often employed violence, nudity, and angry uprisings, spurred scholars to begin considering affective appeals. Though great strides were made, the resurgence of affectively charged movements occurring alongside the proliferation of social media demands a return to affect that be conducted outside the rational/irrational binary.

The rational/irrational binary has stimulated both lengthy debates and crises in communication and sociology alike. For decades, rhetorical scholars defined persuasion as a wholly rational process in which people changed their minds in response to carefully crafted persuasive speeches and logical debates (Gross, 2012; Habermas, 1989). Social movement studies challenged this notion, provoking scholars to think outside of rationality for answers as to why people were moved and how protest functioned to persuade people. In sociology, the study of social movements began with theories of angry crowds as irrational players besieged by a contagion. This perspective led to the near demise of social movement studies until scholars began arguing that protestors were moved by rational reasons as well. In both communication and sociology, the dangerous rational/irrational binary and the concomitant biases against behavior deemed to be irrational has directed what scholars can and should study as well as how. In the next section, I will explore the impact of this binary and explain why we need to leave it behind in social movement studies.

Rhetorical Perspectives

Rhetoric has struggled with limitations imposed by theories predicated on the rational/irrational binary. During the 1960s and 70s, protest practices, media environments, and political and economic landscapes were changing dramatically and, as a result, scholars were forced to alter and rework their theories of social movements to accommodate changing activist practices, tools, and rhetorics as well as changing media. They did so with varying degrees of success. The civil rights movement, the anti-Vietnam War movement, the women's movement, and the environmental movement challenged the very basis of communication as rational discourses generated by rational actors, thereby inciting a crisis.

It is important to note that these social movements grew in tandem with television[i] and the proliferation of images in newspapers. Mass media images captured and disseminated images that incited opposition during numerous social movements. For example, the Vietnam War appeared on newspapers and TV screens as uncensored blunt images including "Accidental Napalm," "Burning Monk," and the hundreds of photos of damaged bleeding American and Vietnamese bodies. During the Civil Rights movements, photos of police officers using fire hoses to disperse crowds and pin people to walls appeared alongside images of police dogs attacking black bodies. These images moved the marches in Birmingham around the country. The Women's Strike for Equality was captured via images showing white and black female bodies marching with arms connected in vast numbers. Media attention helped to disperse not only the messages they were carrying via signs, but also the scale of the protests. The gravity of the U.S.'s environmental crisis became evident via visual evidence of the burning Cuyahoga River,

which helped spark the U.S. environmental movement. The images from these various movements landed in peoples' living rooms. As a result, awareness about the events that transpired multiplied, and the violence, protests, riots, and fires were recognized as having persuasive force. The spread of media, images, and protests laden with terror, fear, anger, and outrage provoked critics to reconsider what counted as rhetoric.

This thread can be traced throughout the social movement scholarship at the time. For example, Haiman (1967) addresses nonrational rhetoric in his essay by carefully tracing the protestors as well as official reactions to a Civil Rights protest in Chicago. In so doing, he legitimizes nonrational discourse, but does so within the rational/irrational binary. Haiman privileges rational and civil debate, which signals a distinct Westerncentrism and Cartesian bias, but is willing to expand the definition of rhetoric beyond traditional boundaries. This results in an enlargement of rhetoric to include "*un*civil disobedience," which (though he considers it to be unacceptable behavior) "within the framework of a democratic society, where only peaceful change can be accepted," can be seen as the "rhetoric of the riot," which as "mindless and indiscriminate as it may be, has its positive function in contemporary America" (Haiman, 1967, p. 105).

Scott and Smith (1969) also strive to give irrational arguments credibility in their study of Black Power rhetoric in the Civil Rights movement. Though the type of confrontation witnessed in Malcolm X's speeches was often disregarded simply as disruptive in rhetorical studies circles, Scott and Smith see these forms of confrontation as a form of persuasion "because this action, as diverse as its manifestations may be, is inherently symbolic. The act carries a message.... it informs us of the essential nature of discourse itself as human action" (1969, p. 7). Unable to deny the persuasive power of

confrontation, Scott and Smith (1969) demand "[a] rhetorical theory suitable to our age" in which "order, civility, reason, decorum, and civil or theocratic law" are recognized as "masks for the preservation of injustice" rather than fundamental to argumentation (p. 8). The Civil Rights protests unfolding across the U.S. necessitated that theorizing of social movements change, expand, and shift to accommodate the changing landscape of social protest. This research functions to challenge traditional notions of rhetoric and complicate them in productive ways.

In the wake of the Civil Rights, Women's rights, and student protests, Simons (1970) also calls for a change to social movement studies that can accommodate rhetoric outside the rational, but he does so by defining them in opposition to socially sanctioned peaceful protests. After looking at both moderate and "militant" rhetorics, Simons comes to the hypothesis that "the decisive changes wrought by militant rhetorics in recent years gives credence to the view that the traditionally prescribed pattern is not the only viable alternative" (1970, p. 8). What has long been considered "irrational" communication is, indeed, effective in persuading people.[ii] Windt Jr. (1972) continues to push scholars further to include slogans, moral arguments, and uncivil behavior as part of the rhetoric of social movements by studying protestors against the Vietnam War. These protestors abandoned these sanctioned forms of resistance and created a whole new language of protest that could "express new ideas, new perspectives, new attitudes" (Windt Jr., 1972, p. 10). Thus, they shifted from what scholars considered to be rational appeals to irrational acts including profanity, public nudity, and slogans laden with moral imperatives. For them, shock was a tool that could be used to move people because "[b]eyond attracting attention, shock also functions as the first step toward rearranging

perspectives. People seldom become concerned about problems until they are shocked" (Windt Jr., 1972, p. 8).

This expansion of rhetoric to include nonrational arguments and appeals eventually led to a redefinition of rhetoric to include studies of place and space,[iii] the visual,[iv] and affect.[v] This move was pivotal for communication scholars and the future of the study of social movements, which were increasingly employing images, image events (DeLuca, 1999), and affect (Bruce, 2015; Gruber, 2014; McHendry, Middleton, Endres, Senda-Cook, & O'Byrne, 2014).[vi]

These changes in what communication scholars consider to be rhetoric were essential to being able to consider the force of violence, anger, rumors, images, and affective appeals in the study of social movements. It also changed how scholars study movements and added a new degree of complexity to communication studies that challenged the more simplistic definition of social movements put forward by Stewart, Smith, and Denton (1984, 2012).[vii] For example, Soderlund's (2005) study takes on the insidious perspective that morally sanctioned social movements are inherently positive when she carefully explores the impacts of the binaries created by U.S. discourses of sex trafficking and the role the media play in perpetuating these oversimplifications. This study complicates the issues at hand by more carefully considering the networks in which the events are unfolding.

Acknowledging and exploring complexities is of great import in the study of social movements that occur in tandem with new media. Ganesh and Stohl (2013) further this work of moving away from binaries in their study of not only technologies, but "the broad dynamics of protests themselves" in the Occupy Wellington protests in New

Zealand (p. 426). They argue "*that it is an emerging technological environment, not a particular technology* that has profound implications for contemporary protest" (Ganesh and Stohl, 2013, p. 428, italics in original). Moreover, they help to challenge the idea that protests are all organized, instead furthering the point that decentralized protests are increasingly common in the age of digital ubiquity. DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun (2012) also turn to Occupy Wall Street to address explicitly the role of social media in social movements by arguing that the "ideal dichotomy that does not exist.... For [them], there is no possible demarcation between the mediated and the real. Mediated worlds are real and reality is always mediated (by media, language, culture, ideologies, and perceptual practices)" (p. 485). This research helps to preserve complexities amid bifurcating binaries that hinder social movements studies. However, there is more work to be done to move past the rational/irrational, democracy/communism, good/evil, and success/failure binaries that obviate important aspects of social movements, especially as scholars move across political and physical borders.

The Swinging Sociological Pendulum

Communication scholars were not alone in their struggles with the rational/irrational divide. In sociology, irrational discourse was the focus of social movement studies, which was spurred, in part, by analyses of the 1930s workers movements that viewed crowds as irrational actors sieged by a contagion that disrupted their logic and sense. The protestors were no longer lucid coherent actors and acted as if a switch had been flipped. The distinct separation of rational and irrational behavior would prove to threaten the study of social movements within sociology. In a society in which logic and rationality are

elevated as ideal human behavior, protestors were dismissed as “irrational or immature,” and thus not a worthy field of study using this perspective (Jasper, 2011, p. 287)

With the influx of protest in the 1960s across the U.S. and Europe, sociologists turned once again to protest in a concerted effort to revive social movement studies, which they did with success. By the 1970s, collective action research became “one of the most vigorous areas of sociology” (Marx & Wood, 1975, p. 363). New forms of protest and social movements begat new theories, including resource mobilization, interactionist collective behavior, political process, and “new” social movement theories (Della Porta & Diani, 2006). Each theory contributed to expanding the borders of research by turning away from contagion theories and stressing the role of rationality in social movements. As the pendulum swung from one extreme to the other, however, it precipitated new problems.

Smelser’s (1963/2011) theory of collective behavior was a deliberate move away from the madness of contagion theory and stressed the interaction between collective behavior and social structures. He viewed collective action as a result of rational responses to socialstructural factors, thereby offering legitimacy to collective behavior, taking it back from the angry irrational mobs that had delegitimized protest.

Resource mobilization theory also emphasized rationality by theorizing social movements as a collection of reasonable actors who mobilize resources in a calculated way. Zald and Ash (1966), for example, use organizational and incentive analysis to examine the transformations of social movement organizations. By focusing on organizations, they highlighted systems associated with rational decision making and also sidestepped the messiness of unorganized and violent protests. This shift of focus was no

accident and was followed by others, including Oberschall (1973), whose book overtly rejects contagion theory and adopts instead Olson's privileging of rational self interest in his study of collective action. This theory errs in its construction of participants as wholly rational actors, but for an important reason—eschewing irrationality was necessary to legitimize collective action. This, however, was occurring within a stultifying binary.

Political process theory, too, strove to bring about new lines of questioning for social movement scholars, including analyses of strategic tactics and the life cycle of protests, but this move foreclosed other important questions (Gould, 2004). Owing to its focus on political and institutional environments, political process theory helped expand social movements beyond conceptualizing actors as marginalized anti-establishment groups and instead focused on the interactions between actors and political systems. For example, Eisenger's work explicitly seeks to "define protest technically and to differentiate it from political violence" by measuring environmental factors including "openings, weak spots, barriers, and resources of the political system itself" (Eisinger, 1971, p. 1; 1973, p. 12). Along the same lines, Piven and Cloward (1979) focus on how political structures limit the success of poor people's movements in the U.S., including the electoral system, using four case studies. Again, taking a highly rational approach, political process theory was able to expand movement studies from oversimplified mob theories to a more complex analysis that included political structures, policies, and interactions between the people and their government.

The term "new social movements" stems from the work of European scholars, who, at the time, were witnessing movements similar to their counterparts in the U.S., but within a different setting. Feeling restricted by the Marxist model popularly used in

Europe, which could not account for the complexity and multiplicity of conflicts and actors, new social movement scholars sought to look outside the tight binarisms of economic based models. Touraine (1981), for example, argued that the shift from an "industrial society" to a "programmed society" would, necessarily, beget a different type of social movement and required new theories. Aside from the more complex and detailed aspects of his argument, Touraine's overarching takeaway was doing work similar to his colleagues across the Atlantic. Touraine was giving credence and legitimacy to social movement studies by emphasizing the rational and insisting that understanding social movements is integral to comprehending how a society makes itself.

Claus Offe's (1985) theory of social movements also functions to complicate the hierarchies inherent in Marxist analyses. He writes: "the politics of new social movements... seeks to politicize the institutions of civil society in ways that are not constrained by the channels of representative-bureaucratic political institutions," thereby blurring the once neatly striated private and institutional binary (p. 820). As society and political institutions change and continually negotiate their roles, Offe insists that the methods with which scholars examine social movements must change. But Offe's work is multiple in its objectives, for he is also distinguishing "new social movements" from the social movements previously studied and then dismissed. "New social movements" are valid objects of study because they are composed of "participants, campaigns, spokespeople, networks, voluntary helpers, and donations," which are distinctly different from the highly informal "multitudes of individuals" on which sociology previously focused (p. 829). Again, both in the U.S. and Europe, scholars were moving away from the irrational mobs to a focus on components of social movements they could use to

stress rational and logical planning as well as thoughtful intent, thereby strengthening the binary in the process.

While the repeated emphasis on rational actors and organizations did function to legitimate protests in sociology, it placed very rigid restrictions on the understanding of protest that numerous scholars have critiqued (Della Porta & Diani, 2006; Gould, 2004; Jasper, 1998, 2011). Thus, beginning in the 1990s, a group of sociologists turned more deliberately to affect and argued for a serious study of emotions as a legitimate and important force in protests.

It must be noted at this point that, in general, sociologists refer to these reactions as *emotional responses*, not *affect,* as I do. While I do not want to conflate emotion and affect, a closer look at how emotions are being defined reveals that some sociologists are talking them about in much the same way I define affect through Deleuze and Guattari (1987), Masssumi (1987, 1995), and Whitehead (1979). Massumi explains affect as "a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another" that impacts a "body's capacity to act" (1987, p. xiii). For him, affect is that which comes before emotion, as emotion is the interpretation of affect. Whitehead (1979) posited that we do not think and therefore exist; rather, we become via feeling the world: "the primitive experience is emotional feeling, felt in its relevance to a world beyond" (p.163). Feeling precedes thinking. Whitehead's definition seeks to dismantle hierarchical binaries. As Shaviro (2009) summarizes Whitehead, "the questions of how we feel, and what we feel, [which] are more fundamental than the epistemological and hermeneutical questions that are the focus of most philosophy and criticism" (Shaviro, 2009, p. 47). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) agree, emphasizing movement when they state that "Flows

of intensity, their fluids, their fibers, their continuums and conjunctions of affects, the wind, fine segmentation, microperceptions, have replaced the world of the subject" (p. 162). In so doing, they move scholars from static nodes of singular autonomous subjects to take an approach that considers movement in the form of affects.

Within sociology, emotion is often defined similarly. For example, Jaspers (2011) defines emotions as "a form of information processing, often faster than our conscious minds operate" (p. 289). Gould (2009) seems to agree when she writes "Affect. Being affected, being moved. Emotion. Motion. Movement, from the post-classical Latin *movementum,* meaning 'emotion,' and then later, 'rebellion,' or 'uprising'" (pp. 2-3). For Gould (and I agree), "the *movement* in 'social movements' gestures toward the realm of affect; bodily intensities; emotions, feelings, and passions; and toward uprising" (2009, p. 3). Thus, in many cases, the study of emotion in sociology is intertwined with the study of affect as I define it—the force that moves people to act.

Eventually, sociologists were able to resurrect emotions as important factors to consider in social movements because so many facets of social movements remain unaccounted for without them. For example, by going back and looking at World War II (Scheff, 2000), the ACT UP protests (Gould, 2004), and the women's movement (Mansbridge, 1986), scholars were able to draw important connections between emotions and movement including its role in building a sense of the collective, destroying harmful binaries, generating support, and culling opposition.

By considering communication and sociology side by side, one can see that both disciplines grappled a great deal with the rational/irrational binary that defined what types of human behavior are considered legitimate. Because rationality was and continues to be

privileged in our society as the ideal form of communication and irrationality (or affect) is defined as its opposite, scholars who retain this binary within their study of social movements remain vulnerable to developing enormous blind spots. Jasper (2011) points out that the welcoming of affect back into the study of social movements made evident several issues, the first of which was "that the traditional but untenable contrast of emotions with rationality persists in the form of other dualisms such as body versus mind, [and] individual versus social" (p. 286). He goes on to argue for a shift to considering *feeling* and *thinking* as parallel, not opposites. In communication, scholars struggled with how to account for the simultaneous existence of both feeling and thinking, and (sometimes begrudgingly) acknowledged the importance of nonrational arguments in rhetorical studies of social movements.

Binaries are incredibly dangerous to scholars, especially those of social movements. As Derrida (2008) makes evident in one of his last essays, binaries that divide the world into two opposing hemispheres are immensely destructive. They cause inertia by fixing two points in contrast to one another as single and indivisible, thereby obfuscating detail, nuance, and, more importantly, discussion (see also Derrida 1978, 1983, 1998). Binaries impose immobility where movement is occurring and thus stagnate studies of social *movements*. Thus, the rational/irrational binary—as well as the real/online world binaries that too often accompany studies involving social media and the democracy/communism binaries that accompany studies of China—end up diverting attention away from the networks that carry rational arguments, emotional appeals, and divergent rationales in favor of more simplistic explanations, models, or indicators of social movement. We need to explore outside these restrictive poles. Examining theoretical approaches that

help to evade the dangerous rational/irrational bias that disguised the depth and breadth of social movement studies is in order.

Moving Theories on Moving the Social

"we have the social theory of our datascape. If you change this datascape, you have to change the social theory"

(Latour, 2011, p. 802).

Why turn to theory here? Theories offer new lenses by which to examine the world and can help us see and think differently. Theories can challenge rutted ways of thinking and they can create ruts in thinking when they are repeatedly used despite changing contexts. In this section, in order to argue for the necessity of a new theoretical framework, I turn to environmental protests in China, which make up the majority of the 180,000 protests erupting each year (Fisher, 2012).[viii]

Protest in China provides a fruitful contemporary case study for communication scholars for four major reasons. First, China is an important global superpower with the world's largest population, second largest economy, and largest online community. Second, protests are occurring across the country on an average of 500 per day, making it a very active country in terms of social movements. Third, freedom of speech and the right to protest are not institutionally protected in China as they are, ostensibly, in the U.S.[ix] and other democratic countries. Thus, China's political terrain provides an alternative context in which to study protest. Fourth, the protests in China are transpiring on a panmediated landscapes saturated with a variety of social media and other online networks—a change that has allowed people to publicly hold their officials accountable

for carrying out laws meant to protect the people and the environment in which they live. For these four reasons—its presence as a global superpower, an active protest environment, an alternative political terrain, and a panmediated landscape—China's social movements call for sustained inquiry.

At this point, I would like to turn again to the Xiamen protests, during which over ten thousand people gathered and marched through the streets of the scenic city on the southeast coast of China. A variety of people came together carrying signs and shouting slogans to keep a PX factory from being built in a residential area. Why was this protest special?

This protest is just one of tens of thousands of subsequent protests that demands a change in thinking about social movements for three major reasons. First, it eludes theories privileging organizations (Simons, 1970) because no one organizing body sent out announcements or called for people to gather in the streets. Second, it defies rational/irrational and offline/online binaries. Finally, the Xiamen protests also make evident the danger in applying an overly moralistic lens to protest.

First, let us examine the lack of organization, which ties directly to the parallel nature of mediated forms of communication as well as the intermingling of affective and rational arguments. Before the protest began, the only ENGO in town—Xiamen Green Cross—issued only neutral statements about the proposed PX plant, for fear that taking sides would jeopardize their nonprofit status (Ma, personal communication, 2014). Thus, they did not take a leadership role in organizing the opposition. People learned about the plans for the PX plant slated for their town not in newspapers or on TV, but on blogs, BBSs, and chat rooms. During the late 2000s, Internet platforms were becoming more

widely used, especially in more affluent cities such as Xiamen, and people were using them outside of work to have discussions and spread information that was censored or left undiscussed in local and national publication outlets, which are heavily regulated by the government.

As dialogues unfolded and stories extended, anger erupted, fear festered, and information morphed into rumors. The people who showed up in the streets were each part of overlapping networks that linked citizen journalists, respected bloggers, fearful residents, knowledgeable academics, and concerned property owners. Information crawled from computer screens to cell phones to street corners to classrooms to office cubicles, splintering at every juncture in a way that shatter illusions of neat organization or linearity. There is no way of separating or striating online and offline worlds in this protest; there was only dense overlap.

The networks that formed were simultaneously forged and expanded via affective appeals and pleas to national environmental laws. Affective appeals alongside rational arguments forged new paths with their rhetorical force. Message boards carried information about environmental impact statements and requests to fellow citizens to stand up against the plant and encourage friends and family to do the same. One blog post from one of Xiamen's most well-known and respected bloggers warned the citizens of Xiamen not to be cowards. Text messages disseminated both information about the protest location as well as allegations that building a PX plant in Xiamen would be akin to dropping an atomic bomb on it. Homeowners were motivated to join the protest because they feared the PX plant would lower their property values. Some joined because they felt it was their civic duty to their home and their neighbors. Others reportedly

joined in because they were paid by real estate agencies (Xiamen interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). Still others united for fear that the PX plant built in their backyard would cause cancer. Affective appeals were mixed with fact-driven arguments in a powerful concoction that dissolved spatial boundaries and cultivated networks; affect and logic were never separate, but entangled to create a momentous force that moved people.

Action (here in the form of protests) discloses information about the nature of relationships (Bateson, 2000). The action of people sharing information and participating in protest revealed to the people a great deal about the nature of their relationship with their government. Whether or not they were driven by rational, irrational, or calculated appeals is far less important than the fact that the people learned that they could speak and their government would listen. Here, language acts as a "force which goes far toward determining how man will conceive of himself and of his world" (Ehninger, 1992, p. 22). The movement did not start or stop with the protests in the streets though. Before bodies gathered, the immense amount of communication between all social classes and age groups helped to reveal the power of the relationships, or *guanxi*, between Xiameners as well as a budding sense of civic duty. After the crowds dispersed, public forums, connections to the central government, and media coverage perpetuated the movement, which revealed a great deal about how these intertwined networks could help change the relationship between local officials and those they were charged with representing.

Beyond this, as will be elaborated upon in the case studies, the outcomes of the Xiamen protests would reverberate across China in a type of movement with immense force that can only be understood within the larger context of China's environmentally focused movement. After the 2007 Xiamen protests, people in cities across China took to

the streets in opposition. While accounts of these protest events as separate and distinct can be helpful, without being situated within a larger context, they prematurely curtail the tracing of movement necessary to study a social movement as large as China's environmentally driven one. Evidence for this claim lies in the fact that the greatest force of the Xiamen protests lies not in the relocation of the plant to Zhangzhou, but the spark it ignited as the winds began to blow news of the event like wildfire across China.[x]

The last way in which this case makes evident that analyses of protests must change is through a necessary shedding of moralistic overtones. Protests are not pure. The Xiamen protests were not composed of purely unselfish individuals uniting simply to save a city from a chemical plant. The reasons for uniting in protest are varied. Some can be characterized as remarkably selfish or oversimplified. Others can be seen as corrupt or self-serving. To become fixated on pure intentions stifles the ability to see protests as integral to comprehending how a society makes itself (Touraine, 1981).

The second reason to shed moralism in the study of social movements is that scholars who glorify social movements as unilaterally positive phenomena that definitively signifies the health of the democratic process are operating within a Western paradigm that assumes a certain idealized style of democracy is appropriate for all nations when it is not. In making this statement, I am not alleging that China's current governmental system is the best system for them or that democracy is bad. What I am saying is that China's unique history, social system, political lineage, land, and population necessitate a form of government that may not yet have been thought of and China must forge its own path in composing a system appropriate to its (changing) circumstances. To assume that China will or needs to turn to the West's problematic version of democracy is

shortsighted and Westerncentric and has functioned to limit scholarship on China (as is the case with Hartnett 2011, 2013).

Third, moralism is a barrier to *thinking* because it allows us to too easily retreat to good/bad binaries that then limit conversations (Abel, 1999; Biesecker, 2013; Brown, 2001; DeLuca, 2011; Foucault, 1990, 1995; Nietzsche, 1990, 1999). As Latour (1993) states, if we are studying force, we should come to the table without any "a-priori ideas about what makes a force, for it comes in all shapes and sizes" (p. 154). To do otherwise would lead us to decide if the Xiamen protest was "good" based on factors including the relocation of the plant to a more vulnerable city instead of tracing its impact. In other instances, moralism encourages thinking of the installation of a waste incinerator in Hangzhou as "bad" because the government is forcing it on the people when trash is piling up at an unsustainable rate due to the perpetuation of environmentally unfriendly practices such as the widespread use of disposable plasticware and wooden chopsticks. Rather than arming oneself with this moralistic approach that privileges only certain trajectories of movement, I propose moving beyond these binaries to more carefully examine movement on a larger scale.

Within communication, McGee (1980) explicitly argued that social movement scholarship too often implies positive linear development despite the fact that social movements are not inherently positive. McGee (1980) writes, "...the term 'social movement(s)' causes us to order social and historical facts such that we can maintain the illusion of 'morality,' 'purpose,' and 'destiny' in largely self-aggrandizing collective behavior" (p. 128). Thus, McGee (1980) is alleging that labeling certain behaviors as "social movements" evidences scholars' desires for linear progression toward a better

society when plenty of "social movements" including, as he lists, fascism, are not portraits of society moving in a positive linear trajectory.

For McGee (1980), the adherence to linearity that Sillars (1980) also points out is steeped in the desire to consider life as "more than a cosmic joke" (McGee, 1980, p. 131). This leads him to argue that

> "movement" is our fondest wish, our dream, a reason to continue living in human society, for it contains an affirmation of human significance. A consciousness is presumed by the concept 'movement' which *requires* meaning, order and pattern in human experience even when these regularities must be manufactured. (McGee, 1980, p. 131)

McGee is critiquing scholars for imposing a certain consciousness and set of desires onto the concept of a social movement. He is not, however, dismissing social movements. Rather, he is pushing scholars toward a focus on movement unbridled by moralism and linearity.

The moves that I have outlined—a networked approach, a rejection of binaries, an embrace of nonlinearity, and an eschewing of moralism—are critical for understanding contemporary social movements. Developing a new theory and perspective requires that we move past common sense practices and perform "a radical critique" of what everybody knows (Deleuze, 1994, p. 132). Now we must begin the work of thinking anew.

Stirring Winds of Change

To begin to think anew, I turn to poststructuralist philosophy including the (net)work of Latour, Deleuze and Guattari, and Bateson to supplement existing theories put forward by McGee and Jasper in communication and sociology, respectively. This turn to French

poststructuralism is a deliberate one and appropriate for a study of China because many of the poststructural thinkers were deeply influenced by a collision with China. Foucault (1994), for example, in *The Order of Things* begins with an entry from a Chinese dictionary that sets the stage for his argument against the supposed naturalness of ordering. This collision challenged deeply embedded cultural assumptions. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) embrace of rhizomatic structures as an important supplement to the hierarchy of the tree is taken directly from Eastern horticulture (p. 18). This supplement to the hierarchy of the tree undergirds many of their groundbreaking concepts including assemblages, nomads, and nonlinearity. These thinkers greatly influenced the work of Latour, whose network theory is inspired by the rhizome and assemblage.

Thus, it is in the space opened up by these thinkers that I propose a method without form that charts movement, pausing at hot spots, to trace the tangled tendrils of the erratic wake of social change. I foreground this conversation with Sillars' (1980) work, which pushes social movement scholarship to overcome three major boundaries. The first is the oversimplification of social movements as linear progressions with a beginning, middle, and end, which can be studied to develop a model to predict future movements.[xi] The second shortcoming Sillars identifies is the use of cause and effect models too simplistic for the wide variety of coalescing factors that spur catastrophe, awareness, and action. The third issue to which Sillars draws attention is an excessively rigid definition of social movements that prevents the flexibility to study *move*ments, or that which is constantly changing and adapting to the conditions at hand.

Sillars defines these problems, but it is McGee (1980) who offers a solution by redirecting social movement studies. For McGee, social movements are not objective

phenomena, but a set of meanings that critics apply to make sense of events. Though scholars treat them as such, social movements are not uniform cohesive entities, and therefore, are not phenomena. Thus, McGee proposes not starting from social movements, but ending in the conclusion that the social did, indeed, move by tracing changing ideographs. If scholars trace these changes, then they can conclude that the social has actually moved. In writing this, McGee puts forward a rather large challenge to those studying protests, campaigns, rebellions, and other eruptions that requires a rethinking of social movements from a *phenomenon* to a *conclusion*. He asks scholars to "make questions of consciousness 'come first,' focusing on the fact of collectivity" (1980, p. 133).

DeLuca (1999) helps to render McGee's call more concrete when he elaborates on McGee's theory, stating that

> groups as well as individuals or institutions, through their rhetorical tactics and strategies create social movements, changes in public consciousness with regards to a key issue or issues, measureable through the changes in the meanings of a culture's key terms in public discourse. (p. 36)

DeLuca puts this call into action throughout his work, offering productive case studies. For example, he traces *nature* as a "contested ideograph" in *Image Politics* and illustrates how various environmental groups employ image events and verbal rhetoric to "consciously deconstruct the modern conception of nature as a realm apart from humanity" (DeLuca, 1999, pp. 69, 78). This commitment to tracing change is also evident in his more recent coauthored piece with Lawson and Sun, in which the authors move from mass media to social media to trace the influence the Occupy Wall Street protests had on discourse and to show how the social did, indeed, move (2012).

In order to continue the work McGee is asking for in different cultures, scholars can

witness the movement of the social not only via McGee's call to trace the emergence of particular ideographs, but also changing networks (using Latour), the growth of certain assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari), the redefinition of citizen/government relationships (Bateson), and the movement of protest across geographic areas. Thus, this dissertation seeks to extend McGee's work by documenting shifts not only in language use, but also networks.

Some of the research in sociology complements McGee's directive. Jasper (2010) also argues that many of the old paradigms that once guided social movement research are no longer useful, given historical and rhetorical changes. Moreover, the static frameworks upon which many social movements theories are predicated lead to a lack of dynamism in contemporary social movement studies; Jasper (2010) pleads: "we sorely need a theory of *action*" (p. 968, emphasis added).

Together, McGee and Jasper call for: 1) a consideration of social movements as meaning, 2) a tracing of changing meanings, 3) a consideration of affect as force, and 4) attention to dynamism and movement. This work is complicated as it travels to different cultures and political systems such as China. In order to elaborate on how methods must adapt to certain circumstances, I will turn to tracing the concept of nationalism in Chinese protest.

Before tracing changing ideographs, I want to outline some of the troubles that abound in China, a country that deals constantly with censorship not only in the form of deletion, but also via preemptive directives. For example, the central government will issue written commands to media outlets—often after an event—that forbids investigating or writing about an issue. The directives will also often include instructions

on how to frame the event (see *China Digital Times'* Ministry of Truth for copious examples).[xii] These are, however, easily leaked and all to often for the central authorities, end up circulated on the Internet. For example, after Chai Jing's movie, *Under the Dome,* garnered between 200 and 300 million views and was shared over 650 million times on Weibo in just one week, the government issued the following command:

> Video websites are to delete "Under the Dome." Take care to control related commentary. As the new reporting period for media personnel Weibo and WeChat accounts begins, concerned personnel are kindly asked to proactively submit account information to the record keeper. We reiterate that media personnel must not post content that violates regulations on either personal or official public platforms, or else face severe punishment. (March 6, 2015) (Henochowicz, 2015)

Within days, searches for "Under the Dome" (穹顶之下) and "smog + APEC" (雾霾+APEC) were also blocked. This kind of blocking makes tracing the use of certain words or phrases difficult at best. Thus, to trace the impact of *Under the Dome,* one has to take a more creative approach. For example, scholars can look within the movie for the themes that are discussed such as the impact of pollution on children and then trace the discussions that stem from it on Baidu's *tieba* or Weibo. Or, scholars can document increases in calls to the environmental hotline number offered to viewers at the end of the movie. These topics are addressed in the movie and changes should be apparent, but searches for "*Under the Dome*" will deliver data that show little impact.

Tracing changes to discourse is also complicated by the fact that the government will issue verbal orders that are never documented in writing. The officials responsible for keeping harmony are aware that any written directives may be uploaded to social media feeds, so they will pass orders along via phone calls that are then passed on to relevant persons. For example, one academic with whom I spoke was given the order to not

discuss freedom of speech in the classroom. This sort of discussion was strictly forbidden and to disobey this directive would certainly have consequences. As a result, tracing discussions concerning freedom of speech may not tell scholars much. However, the very lack of "freedom of speech" can tell us more than its presence, if we know to look there. This requires scholars to immerse themselves in the culture, research the vernacular, and look carefully at what is missing.

These are merely a few examples of the problems one confronts when trying to trace terminology in contemporary China.[xiii] In making this point, I do not mean to say that censorship is unilaterally successful and functions to eradicate certain words from popular vocabularies, as this is not the case. Internet users in China are remarkably savvy about using homonyms, images, and word play to circumvent censors. They are also very adept at moving between platforms and functionalities.[xiv] My point is to say that impacts of censorship require new and unconventional means of tracing not just presences, but absences.

Civic Duty and the Rhetoric of Nationalism in Crisis

If, as Tang and Darr (2012) argue, "Nationalism is one of the most powerful forces of collective action," then social movement scholars would be remiss to ignore it (p. 811). In studying environmental movements in China, what has become clear through my research is that Tang and Darr's argument is valid. Many of the protestors who march down the street fighting against chemical plants do not consider themselves to be environmentalists. When asked why they are risking imprisonment, protestors reply that it is their "civic duty" to fight against the polluting factory. Likewise, when I asked

people working for ENGOs why they chose to become involved and agree to a much lower salary than they would otherwise make as college graduates, they reply by saying "it is my civic duty." The term "civic duty" is an ideograph that has come into popular usage to mean it is one's duty to sacrifice for the betterment of China as a whole, and is one of many manifestations of Chinese nationalisms. Thus, to understand why these people are protesting, we must understand the movement of nationalisms.

Numerous scholars have studied nationalism and identified different expressions of it, which are particular to changing political environments, including Cabestan (2005), who discusses *official nationalism, revanchist nationalism, primitive nationalism, instrumentalist nationalism, modernizing nationalism,* and *pro-Western nationalism* in China. These iterations are never separate, but always overlapping and multiple. Goodman's (1995) work, which also traces nationalism, is quite different in that she focuses on following a single strain of nationalism, which she grounds in native place ties (a form I will argue is reemerging and shaping social movements in China today). Other scholars such as Gries (2005) offer a nuanced description of nationalism in China that complicates more simplistic approaches. Rather than characterize nationalism as a movement from either the CCP to the people via propaganda (top-down) or mass movements that originate with the people (bottom-up), Gries argues they are both and that nationalisms are the product of *relations* and *interactions* that cannot be understood in isolation. To expand upon this, he turns to the concept of *face*.

Still other studies have begun to use scholarship about nationalism to map its movement across China. For example, Hyun and Kim (2015) turn to *cybernationalism* to explore "how Chinese Internet users' online political expression and talks relate to

nationalistic and system-supportive attitudes" (p. 767). Many other types of nationalism have also emerged in studies that look outside China, including *ethnic nationalism, liberal nationalism, state nationalism, pragmatic nationalism, elite nationalism,* and *mass nationalism* (Tang & Darr 2012). For the purposes of this section, I will use Gries' (2005) definition of nationalism—"any behavior designed to restore, maintain, or advance public images of [a] national community"— and trace the genesis of civic duty (p. 9).

Nationalism has a long history in China that stems from China's era of terror (or Century of Humiliation)—when the country was falling apart and then besieged by the Opium Wars of 1840—and the subsequent fall of the Qing dynasty. During this period of forced contact with the West, China was invaded by numerous countries and dethroned from its "almost permanently dominant global position" (Cabestan, 2005, p. 3). Due to the large expense it would have cost any country, however, China was never fully colonized. Instead, it was forced to sign a series of unequal treaties with almost any nation that landed on their shoreline. These treaties forced China to forfeit its access to important trading ports, gave foreigners sovereignty over numerous tracts of land, and emptied any remaining silver left in the country's coffers.

The Chinese people rose up against foreign imperial forces numerous times. The Boxer Rebellion (1899-1901) was one of the most notable early uprisings, but the Chinese were ultimately defeated by a coalition of foreign forces that left them with further fines and unequal treaties as well as a feeling of defeat. In subsequent popular resistances to the brutal Japanese invasions of the 1930s, the Chinese were left ruined and desperate. These physical defeats threw the country into a deep crisis, and this crisis occurred during their emergence into modernity.

Over the course of the foreign invasions, small pockets of Chinese people resisted, but widespread infighting and corruption made unifying the country to fight together difficult. One potential force capable of joining individual and disparate factions was a form of nationalism defined by a widespread hatred for imperialist invaders. The development of a coalescing form of nationalism able to unite China as a whole, however, was slow to evolve. Certain factors in place helped to gradually pull people together, beginning at the local level. Native place ties played an important role in uniting people from the same area. During this time, "The ideological connection between native place identity and Chinese identity was grounded in traditional ideas of concentric circles of cultural and territorial identity" (Goodman, 1995, p. 389). One's native place was viewed as a microcosm of the country and, thus, love for one's native place strengthened China writ large. These efforts to mobilize at the local level would prove to be essential for organization on a national level.

Goodman (1995) traces this in her study of native place ties in the early 1900s. At this time, people were uniting in local factions in opposition to invading forces, and local Chinese newspapers promoted and encouraged such behavior. Confrontations between Chinese and outsiders led to a number of legal battles, protests, and boycotts in areas of the country such as Shanghai where tensions between Chinese and imperialist forces were particularly high. Shanghai was one of the most important trading ports and served then, as it does today, as China's financial center. Invading forces built and managed banks along the shores of the Yangtze River in an area called The Bund. Local altercations in which the Chinese people were defending their fellow citizens frequently erupted and eventually grew outward, moving from local to national levels as word

spread of various countries' further unfair treatment of the Chinese.

The budding transformation of localism to nationalism is evident in Goodman's description of an incident involving the lenient sentence given to a Russian sailor convicted for the death of a Chinese citizen in Shanghai. When the judge let the sailor go free despite his guilt, local people were in a furious uproar and demanded the sailor serve his time in jail. Unsurprisingly, these pleas were not met with much concern until the protestors initiated a boycott of Russian goods that grew from a group of local merchants to buyers across the country, in which people from afar united against the Russians as invaders. This boycott eventually resulted in the extension of the sailor's sentence. This is but one example of many similar situations.

Localism slowly transformed into nationalism, and overt expressions of nationalism were encouraged. The Chinese peoples' "[l]ove for the native place and activism in the interest of local self-government were conceived as integral to national strengthening, creating the local constituent building blocks for a modern constitutionalist state" (Goodman, 1995, p. 403). As the Qing fell further into oblivion, the anti-Western sentiments that united people persisted. Thus, nationalism developed for the first time in China's history, but it was a very particular breed. Cabestan (2005) argues that "China after 1840...could not be other than unanimously nationalist and anti-Western" (p. 4).

What the people were lacking was a leader who could harness this nationalism to pull China out of its defeat. Mao Zedong and the Communist Party would prove to be the force that could channel local forms of nationalism during the Long March and unite them into a powerful strand of nationalism capable of ousting foreign forces as well as the rival Chinese party, the Guomintang. And he did. A deliberate closing off of China to

outside forces followed as Mao and his compatriots worked to reestablish China as the predominant global power.

To state that "the Chinese communist movement in the first half of the twentieth century is just as much a nationalist movement, and the communist victory in 1949 is just as much a victory of Chinese nationalism as a victory of communism" "is not an exaggeration" (Tang & Darr, 2012, p. 813). During his early years, "Mao advocated provincial ties as fundamental to China's salvation" acknowledging "the province as the microcosm of the nation" (Goodman, 1995, p. 410). As he gained support, Mao would change his stance, finding localism to be a threat to the country's unification. This demanded a redefinition of nationalism that eradicated place associations beginning with Mao's official ascent to power in 1949. Saving the nation became the number one priority under Mao, and all other issues—including environmentalism and human rights issues among others—were subservient to national issues.

Mao's form of nationalism was bound up with a series of revolutions and demanded everyone believe and act in the name of the nation, which was always above the individual. During this time, everything had to be in service to the nation, including art, literature, and other creative endeavors. As Mao proclaimed in one of his talks, "Literature and art [must] become a component part of the whole revolutionary machinery, so they can act as a powerful tool in uniting and educating the people while attacking and annihilating the enemy" (quoted in Andrews & Shen, 2012, p. 151). The environment, too, was sacrificed in the name of the nation's development under Mao's directive that to conquer nature (Shapiro, 2001). Anyone who did not engage in and promote this intense form of nationalism was considered suspect and open to public

scrutiny, shame, humiliation, and excommunication from society.

While nationalism in one particular manifestation helped to lift China out of ruin and unite the people, under Mao, it ultimately became a force that transformed China into a dangerous and unstable monoculture lacking diversity in regard to scientific opinions, environmental concerns, religious beliefs, and philosophical imperatives. Nationalism was the only belief system to which people were permitted to subscribe. One after another, Mao's initiatives and revolutions continued to tap into the fear and shame of China's fall from power at the hands of the West (including Japan) and insist that the people conform in order to catch up to and surpass the very countries responsible for China's fall. This breed of nationalism could only be sustained by a series of revolutions, which left the country reeling from mass initiative after mass initiative such as the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward.

The people were given reprieve from Mao's unsustainable strain of nationalism with his death in 1976. With the appointment of Deng Xiaoping came the opening up of China and the proliferation of different forms of nationalism. China's enormous population and landmass provided space for nationalism to be cultivated in diverse social, religious, patriotic, and economic networks. This flourishing of local networks resulted from Deng Xiaoping's shifting of governance from central authorities to local levels, giving provinces and cities more autonomy in an effort to strengthen China. Local authorities became the overseers of local economies and the enforcers (or neglectors) of national laws. Nationalism, necessarily, shifted as the central government opened up China's borders.

Deng's transition to the local redefined relationships and served as the impetus for the

reemergence of native place ties, which had been disrupted by Mao's decision to divide families and relocate many city dwellers to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution. Deng's reform remade cities and provinces into microcosms of the nation. Each locality was responsible for generating its own GDP and enforcing the laws put forth by the central government. The tax system put into place relied heavily on corporations to generate revenue and compelled many local leaders to solicit companies to build within their city and provincial limits. This was the primary means by which they could meet local GDP growth goals, as revenue from income tax was extremely low, especially in rural farming communities. Giving local officials the burden of generating the revenue necessary for their town to flourish resulted in widespread corruption at local levels as officials welcomed dangerous industries into their jurisdictions with tax exemptions and a promise to turn a blind eye to environmental regulations. Thus, soliciting companies to one's town became a lucrative, competitive, and widespread practice for officials. If one city insisted upon going through the proper channels to ensure a safe environment that would assuredly cost the company more money, businesses could easily find another town that would help it forego the hassle and expenses.

Local GDP growth led to national GDP growth, which would ultimately impact the trajectory of Chinese nationalisms and warrants a brief discussion of the rising middle class, the influx of Western ideas, and changes to media. China's opening up ushered in a breathtaking level of economic expansion, industrialization, and movement that would fundamentally alter ways of life at the local level. For instance, people in the coastal town of Xiamen witnessed their properties skyrocket in value as tourism grew and the *nouveau*

riche came to visit their beaches. The port city of Dalian welcomed new industries to its docks and experienced a massive increase in local revenue. With the rise in car culture came the growth of the oil industry that boosted the city where Sinopec was headquartered, Maoming, to having one of the highest GDPs in the province. People's lives were changing rapidly as more and more people were lifted out of poverty.

On the national level, people across the country were being exposed for the first time in years to Western makeup, fashion, art, literature, religion, and science, which diversified the monoculture Mao had left. The growth of ideas, intellectualism, creativity, and ambition matched the remarkable market growth. People were eager to try on new clothes and ideas, experiment with oil paints and Christianity, and read about foreign news and Huck Finn's adventures. This contact with the West led to what some scholars call the second great intellectual revolution in modern China, during which scholars began mixing Chinese traditions and ideas with Western systems and thoughts.[xv]

At the same time, the Chinese media was undergoing major changes and the economic reforms "led to the proliferation of media at the local level" while "decentralization made the media more difficult for the Party to control" (Gries & Rosen, 2004, p. 8). This increased freedom gave Chinese reporters inspired by Western style objectivity and investigative reporting a platform by which they could disseminate information. *Southern Weekend,* which is known as China's most liberal newspaper still today, was established in 1984. Though overseen by Guangdong provincial authorities, the paper became a forerunner in China's media reform and was established to offer readers more objective reports on current events, unimpeded by the strict government oversight and control of the CCP's official mouthpiece, *People's Daily.*

Diverse networks of ideas and practices were springing forth at the same time communication technologies were proliferating. In 1994, the Internet was introduced in China. A nationwide wireless phone network was established four years later. Access to telephones and fax machines was increasing and connecting people in new and overlapping networks. Over the next several years, as telephone and fax lines emerged to conduct business, connect with people from afar, and share information overseas, people were connecting with one another in new ways and forging channels of communication by which they could share news, images, literature, research, and rumors.

These expansions and extensions of overlapping networks created a new configuration of conduits for excitement, ideas, outrage, resistance, and organization. Yes, the media were still state controlled and much of that which came from the West was filtered, but these controls could not entirely control communication networks armed with speed and vast in scale. The flow of new ideas, especially among the educated, was a threat to the central government, as is evident in China's most violent protest in recent record—the Tiananmen Square protests. In 1989, nearly a million students, intellectuals, and frustrated citizens who had been thinking, reading, and digesting new ideas and information staged a protest during which they asked their government for political change in the world's largest public plaza, Tiananmen Square. The protests were timed to coincide with the anniversary of the May 4th movement, but persisted for weeks afterwards. As the movement grew in Beijing, so too did it grow in other cities, garnering groups of supporters in city and town plazas across China.

Despite efforts to disperse the crowds, including visits from government officials, protestors remained steadfast in the square. The government sent troops in on May 20. It

was not until the night of June 3, after government officials approved the military offensive, that violence erupted. Military tanks moved in and military personnel opened fire on the unarmed crowd, killing an unknown number of protestors and injuring hundreds of others. This decision to use force "marked a resort to coercion" (Gries & Rosen, 2004, p. 8). Silence followed for days. On June 9, Deng Xiaoping made a public statement praising the military officers for their work to quash the attempt to overthrow communism.

Left with a fractured and frightened public, the government was in dire need of reuniting the people in the wake of the tragedies, so central leaders turned, once again, to an anti-imperialist form of nationalism. Since the Tiananmen movement was viewed as a prodemocracy and pro-West movement, this shift back to anti-imperialist discourses that fueled China's nationalism a century prior was intended to "boost the nation's spirit, enhance cohesion, foster national pride, consolidate and develop a patriotic united front, and rally the masses' patriotic passions" (Callahan, 2006, p. 186). The campaign was a multimedia one that mobilized schools, television, popular magazines, and newspapers. A new textbook was compiled and released in schools nationwide shortly after the protests in 1990, the year of the 150th anniversary of the Opium Wars. Stories intended to stoke anti imperialist sentiments proliferated in every form of media, and National Humiliation Day—a day of remembering the atrocities brought about by Western and Japanese forces—was brought back as a national holiday and celebrated nationwide (Callahan, 2006).

This very calculated and widespread effort was successful in that it reunited the country toward a common goal of overcoming oppression and stoked anti-Western

sentiments. School children were being taught from a young age that China should define itself in opposition to those who had conquered it. It also functioned to frame pro-Western ideas as traitorous and, as a result, many people who advocated for democracy were ostracized or jailed. However, as Callahan (2006) points out in his case study, "the state is never totally successful; nationalism and humiliation both keep crossing the official boundaries to go in unexpected directions to produce unorthodox identities" because nationalism is a continual and dynamic performance (pp. 201, 203). Gries (2005) concurs: "Clearly, even when [the CCP] chooses a strategy of suppression, the Chinese State does not have the monopoly over nationalism" (p. 125). The dynamic performance of nationalism is what Latour calls a *black box.*

The Black Box of Nationalism

The term *black box* is one Latour (2003) imported from cybernetics where it stands for a "piece of machinery or a set of commands [that] is too complex" to philosophy, where it means anything wherein we take the interior, composition, or networks that hold it in place for granted (pp. 2-3). Latour illustrates the black box through science by exploring the impending discovery of the double helix. Rather than focusing solely on the science, Latour turns to the surrounding circumstances that helped shape the discovery of the double helix, including faculty fellowships, scientific uncertainties, faulty computers, competition between researchers, power plays, funding, and professional hierarchies. The neat and tidy double helix that we accept today is a black box that, if unpacked, surges with tangled messes of relations and dynamics absent from its neat scientific position.

Nationalism in China, too, is a black box in that many different components,

including war, trade, the collision of Western ideas and Eastern practices, protests, economies, political figures, face, embarrassment, and socialism with Chinese characteristics compose it. To understand it, we must unpack it. Thus, following Latour (2003), who insists on an entry into his area of study—science and technology studies—"through the back door of science in the making, not through the more grandiose entrance of ready made science," I argue for an approach to social movements not through the grandiose package of a successful social movement, but the making of the movement (after movement has been deemed to happen, of course) (p. 4).

To explore nationalism through this lens is to know that nationalism is unpredictable. Though government officials can work to amp up and direct nationalism, they cannot harness it completely. As a result, we see nationalism functioning in a variety of ways simultaneously. In the next subsection, I will discuss the nationalisms evident in the environmental campaigns across China before moving backwards to trace civic duty.

Civic Duty and Environmentalism

The issue of nationalism is threaded throughout China's environmental crisis movement. Rather than aligning over anti-Western sentiments, many are gathering together over anti-environmental degradation sentiments, an activity that the government promoted and encouraged in the early years of its environmental efforts. When Deng Xiaoping shifted fiscal responsibility and environmental oversight from central to local governments, he also forfeited a certain level of control over and awareness of the devastation occurring. Thus, while the central government was conscious of the proliferation of polluting industries, they were likely unaware of the terms of these

agreements or the extent of their dumping and unsafe practices.

When environmental degradation began crossing local borders and tainted fish appeared in markets in Beijing while rivers in Southern China were turning black, the central government was forced to pay attention and take measures to stop this (Economy, 2010). Due to the new decentralized governance structure, it made sense to call on the local people to hold their governments accountable. This was a way of employing the people to do work for the central government. They did not, however, foresee the unrest that would eventually erupt in the form of mass protests across the country decades later. Nor could they have predicted that, with the introduction of social media and the ability to build networks outside state controlled media outlets, these protests would spread across vast distances via images and outrage, inciting localism and nationalism in cities all over the country.

Many things motivate people to protest, but one common theme in the interviews, reports, slogans, and signs is native place ties. These ties to place play an important part in these protests, as do the networks that connect Xiamen to Dalian to Maoming to Shanghai. Protestors and ENGO employees alike with whom I have spoken again and again cite a love of the place they live as a reason for their involvement. On Weibo, images of anti PX protestors holding signs declaring their love for their town abound, as is illustrated in the Figures 1, 2, and 3 below.

Traces of localism also abound in the messages that move fastest and furthest. Take, for example, the aforementioned text message sent flying around Xiamen during the 2007 anti PX protests that brought bodies to the streets. It was effective, in part, because it equated the proposed PX plant with an atomic bomb, or the leveling of their home. In

Figure 1. A Dalian protestor holds up a shirt that reads "I [heart] Dalian" and stands next to a protestor wearing a PX mask"[xvi]

Figure 2. A Maoming protestor carries a sign reading "Maoming, I just love you! Love you with such fresh air!"[xvii]

Figure 3. Dalian protestors hold a sign reading: "I love Dalian. Reject poisoning!"[xviii]

Dalian, when typhoon Muifa breached the walls of the PX plant on their coast, fear of their town's demise swelled up into a *force majeure* that gathered thousands of residents in front of the government buildings at the People's Square. In Maoming, a city no stranger to industry, one protestor's concern for future generations that would live in Maoming was apparent when he remarked, "I think we already live in pollution, so I want our next generation not to have to live under the influence of pollution" (Maoming interviewee 2, personal communication, 2015). These people all want to stay and they want to be safe in their home.

When people unite to protest against polluting industries, they are uniting in a form of localism that extends nationally via social media networks, inspiring others to fight for the place they live. This localism, or native place ties, echoes the type of nationalism evident in the aforementioned study by Goodman. The people united because of local issues, which in Goodman's case study, provided the base for the expansion of nationalism to a national level.

Each of the protests featured in this dissertation were in defense of a group of peoples' hometown. When the protestors voiced their demand, it was that the plant not be built in *their* town. If enough towns fight, the plant will have no home, but some cities are better equipped to protest and win than others. What happened in the case of Xiamen was that the plant was moved to another smaller city in Fujian province, Zhangzhou. Officials, anticipating protests after the announcement of the move, warned Zhangzhou residents not to participate in the uprisings and immediately quashed the few that did occur. Thus, this native place form of nationalism is limited in the face of big business and government officials desperate for increased revenue. The brand of native place nationalism that united Xiameners did not produce the same success for the people of Zhangzhou. Successful protests cannot be reduced to a formula. However, since Xiamen, protests have spread to other areas, and with each manifestation, posed a growing threat to central authorities.

The current fragmentation of the environmental movement in China evidences people's desperation to do as much as they can with the tools at hand as well as a lack of organization between cities to create a united nationwide front against pollution. At the same time, their options are limited in the face of corruption. The central government's systems that localize GDP provide fertile ground for environmental violations to occur either by ignoring and sidestepping environmental regulations or by allowing shoddy costcutting construction. The localized systems also promote a more localized form of nationalism, which has not yet completely transcended to a form of nationalism capable of eradicating environmental abuses and safety violations across the country. However, within the rising notion of civic duty lies potential for the unification necessary to topple

environmental abuses on a greater scale. And this concept is growing quickly. To understand this concept, we must first trace its etymology.

Tracing Words

Let us look more closely at the word *civic duty* or *gongmin yiwu* (公民义务). The first part of the term, *gongmin,* means *citizen* or *civic.* This is also a term used to describe the collective. Chinese culture has very strong ties to the collective and community. According to the Hofstede scale, China, which scores a 20 out of 100 in individualism, "is a highly collectivist culture where people act in the interests of the group and not necessarily of themselves" (Geert Hofsteded, 2013, para. 5). This means that people tend to feel a type of responsibility for others, including family, friends, and other groups that is far less prevalent in highly individualistic cultures such as the U.S., which scores a 91 on the same scale.

The second half of the term *yiwu* can be translated as *your service or work is a kind of justice.* The first character, 义, in its traditional form 義, is a combination of the characters 我 and 羊, which mean *I/me* and *goat*, respectively. According to etymologists, this combination of characters speaks to the generosity of "giving a goat as a sacrifice each year to the poor," which highlights the act of giving to benefit others in the community (Sears, 2013, para. 1). This also speaks to Confucian philosophy, which calls for one to sacrifice to those who rank above you in the Confucian hierarchy, including the father of a family, government officials, and, of course, the emperor. Over the years, the character has taken on additional meanings, including *obligation, commitment, right conduct, justice, volunteer duty, mandatory,* and *voluntary*.

The second part of the word, *wu,* means *business, affair, matter, must, should*. Together, *yi* and *wu* come to mean that people have a duty and obligation to conduct their affairs rightly. Combined with *gongmin,* the four characters direct this obligation toward serving the public—a way of thinking that is growing among certain circles in China, especially the intellectuals and educated youth. Research shows that collectivist behavior of the ilk promoted by *gongmin yiwu* is often associated with periods of difficulty when a collectivist mentality is necessary to overcome widespread problems (Vliert, Yang, Wang, & Ren, 2013). Indeed, the air, water, and soil pollution has caused widespread crises in virtually every corner of China and locals are uniting to hold their officials accountable for the pollution they have welcomed or are welcoming into their cities. These localized uprisings have the potential to unite into a nationwide assault on environmental degradation, as was the case with the nationalism that grew in response to imperialist invasions.

The term *civic duty* also speaks to a change in peoples' notion of citizenship from the days of Mao when the Chinese people were told what to do and think and expected to follow their leaders without much questioning. Many Chinese citizens today see it as their duty and obligation to question their leaders when they and their families are at risk. They are charged with the same duty of the literati in traditional China—as "interpreters of the political classics and custodians of the 'Mandate of Heaven'...[who] could and often did challenge the emperor's legitimacy claims" (Gries & Rosen, 2004, p. 6). With the influx of pollution and pollution related illnesses and deaths, the cosmic order, so to speak, is in disarray and the people must participate in the restoration of society. This is evident to those researching China's changing political landscape. For instance, Gries and

Rosen (2004) argue that the "Chinese people—peasants, workers, students—are increasingly contesting the legitimacy of the current regime; analysts would be wise not to ignore them" (p. 5). In 2004, Gries (2005) was already seeing popular networks "challenging the state's hegemony over nationalism" (p. 134). Peoples' relationship with their government was changing attitudes about what a citizen could and should do.

According to Professor Li Hui, the term *civic duty* has grown in popularity because "the word represents [that] most of our people are being awakened, enlightened" to their obligation to participate in the decisions impacting their homes, families, and livelihoods (personal communication, 2015). The increasing unrest regarding environmental issues in China has amplified this call to duty and engaged tens of thousands of people who do not consider themselves environmentalists necessarily, but do know they have an obligation to their fellow citizens to oppose dangerous wastewater pipelines, chemical factories, and garbage incinerators that will pollute their resources, bodies, and networks. It is their civic duty to take on the potential consequences of protest—including beatings, jail time, humiliation, or worse—and sacrifice for the betterment of society.

Civic Duty Eruptions and Disruptions

As was previously established, though the government often uses nationalism as a tool to unite and mobilize the people, they cannot control it. The notion of "civic duty" discussed above is just one of nationalism's unpredictable manifestations that "shed[s] light on the deeply emotional character of Chinese nationalism..., [which] manifests itself through moments of intense mobilisation" (Cabestan, 2005, p. 10). People are fighting for one another, for their homeland, and against corruption, but the level of commitment to

civic duty and the fearlessness that often accompanies it are, more and more, leading to mass riots—a sign of instability that makes officials cringe. As Shirk (2008) makes evident in her work, "what the Chinese leaders fear most is a national movement that fuses various discontented groups—such as unemployed workers, farmers, and students—under the banner of nationalism," which I argue is a very real potential of civic duty (p. 821). If these diverse groups unite against the state and protest, they threaten China's political stability in a very real and tangible way.

This is likely why discussions of *civic duty,* like *freedom of speech,* have been banned in college classrooms per government orders. Civic duty has a very real potential to create revolution and though it cannot be talked about in public forums over which the government has oversight, signs of its presence appear in places like *Southern Weekend.* Specifically, one can witness calls to civic duty within the scandal that besieged China's most widely read and liberal newspaper in January of 2013.

To usher in the New Year, *Southern Weekend's* Dai Zhiyong wrote an editorial he titled "China's dream, the dream of constitutionalism," but it was never published. The Guangdong provincial Propaganda chief, Tuo Zhen, rewrote the editorial without notifying any of the staff or asking consent from the editors—a clear violation of propaganda protocol. The new title Tuo gave the piece was "Dreams are our promise of what ought to be done."

The original piece played off Xi Jinping's "China Dream," which had recently begun to circulate widely and gain popularity. Dai's dream called "for a bold realization of the 'dream of constitutionalism in China', so that civil rights could be protected and power effectively checked" (Bandurski, 2013, para. 4). Dai goes on to explain that China's

success as a country is related to civic engagement in political processes. The editorial states:

> Only if constitutionalism is realized and power effectively checked can citizens voice their criticisms of power loudly and confidently, and only then can every person believe in their hearts that they are free to live their own lives. Only then can we build a truly free and strong nation. (as cited in Bandurski, 2013, para. 4)

In this quote lies evidence of Dai's call for people to take seriously their civic duty. He is asking his fellow citizens to do what is right and criticize their leaders when necessary in a collective effort to improve the government, a government that has been proven to be rife with corruption and in need of repair.

The version Tuo wrote differed greatly in that it was devoid of any calls to action, focusing instead on the peoples' achievements to date:

> Dreams are our own expectations. Dreams are our promise of what ought to be done. This is the 1,057th time we have seen you [i.e., the 1,057th edition of the paper], and it is the first time we have seen you this year. In the past, now and in the future, you have defended your lives and we have defended this newspaper. Here we extend our blessing and hope that in this new year we can all come a step closer to our dreams.... We are now closer than we have ever been to this dream, thanks to livelihood promises (民生承诺)... every person's destiny is closely tied to the destiny of our nation and its people. (as cited in Bandurski, 2013, para. 14)

This new version stresses the connection between the people and the nation, but does not mention speaking out, voicing criticisms, or creating change. Rather, it seems to caution that "every person's destiny is closely tied to the destiny of our nation and its people" and thus, the people must be cautious and obedient rather than outspoken and critical.

In response to this egregious disregard for policy, 35 former *Southern Weekend* employees and 50 interns wrote two open letters demanding Tuo's resign for his breach of protocol. The first open letter, like the original editorial, evoked a similar call to civic duty by proclaiming love for one's country as well as the desire to make it better: "This

newspaper has for many years been a paper that sincerely loves its country and its people. The people [who work] there hope, in a spirit of goodwill, that their country can be better" (Elgot, 2013, para. 10). Students from Sun Yat-sen University also wrote an open letter stressing the need for the people of China to stop being passive and obedient. They called on fellow students and citizens to *do something*. In their view, "It is because we have yielded to power that it has become unbridled and wanton; it is because we have been silent that the Constitution has become a rubber stamp" (H. Gao, 2013, para. 13). It is because they have not risen to fulfill their civic duty that China's government is rife with corruption and the cosmic order is in disarray. Eighteen prominent intellectuals, too, wrote their own strongly worded open letter of support of *Southern Weekend*.

The support for the paper was also very visible on the streets and social media screens. Citizens gathered outside the *Southern Weekend* offices carrying signs and standing together in a show of support. Images of the demonstrators and the signs they carried were shared widely on Weibo. Many signs echoed Dai's call to civic duty by stressing the need to be critical and face the dangers inherent in protest in China. One sign read: "If I don't stand up today, I won't be able to stand up tomorrow" (H. Gao, 2013, para. 12). Action is necessary if the people are to keep their rights. One demonstrator remarked in an interview with the Associated Press, "I feel the ordinary people must awaken... The people are starting to realise [sic] that their rights have been taken away by the Communist party and they are feeling that they are being constantly oppressed" (Kaiman, 2013a, para. 3).

At the same time, people crowded in front of the newspaper's offices, two admired actresses, Yao Chen and Li Bingbing, showed their support of *Southern Weekend's*

journalists on the Sina Weibo microblogs. Yao posted the following quote from a Russian dissident author that read "One word of truth outweighs the whole world" alongside the paper's nameplate to her 31.7 million followers, and within 2 hours, it was reposted more than 30,000 times (Ramzy, 2013). On Weibo, discussions, comments, and images of what was happening had flourished until, of course, they were censored.

The government responded to the online activity by taking over *Southern Weekend's* official Weibo account and posting messages that claimed Tuo's editorial that appeared was actually written by Dai. What followed is an example of a small *huo* or *fire* on the Internet in China. A *Southern Weekend* employee quickly posted on another account that the organization's Weibo account had been taken away. In a mere 13 minutes, this statement was retweeted 21,372 times before it was removed (Elgot, 2013). Soon thereafter, searches for *Southern Weekend* returned this message: "According to relevant laws, regulations and policies the search results for 'Southern Weekend' cannot be shown" (Elgot, 2013, para. 18). But this did not stop people from talking nor did it stop people from fulfilling their civic duty.

As Gao (2013) put it, the people protesting displayed "a rising level of civil consciousness in their words and actions. They perceive themselves as members of an organic society to which they bear responsibility, and one in which each will be affected by the actions they collectively take or fail to take" (para. 12). In other words, they have a sense of civic duty that necessitates they answer the growing call to the collective.

At this time, Xi Jinping had only served approximately 1 year in office. In December 2012 (just prior to the *Southern Weekend* incident), Xi gave a speech commemorating the 30th anniversary of China's 1982 Constitution, extolling its virtues. This caught the

attention of a number of Chinese people including, of course, Dai from *Southern Weekend* (who wrote his column less than a month later) because the Constitution guarantees free speech as well as freedom of assembly. Xi himself stated in that speech that the Constitution must be used to keep the government in check, and that "[n]o organization or individual has the privilege to overstep the Constitution and the law" (quoted in Lynch, 2014). This speech came in the wake of a number of corruption scandals and was accompanied by Xi's declaration of a "war against corruption." People around the country were inspired by Xi's commitment restore the cosmic order.

This evocation of the Constitution as a means of keeping the government in check, however, slowly and suspiciously faded away as calls to the collective, to civic duty, increased. By mid-2014, when a collected volume of Xi's speeches was released, his speech on the Constitution was omitted. I argue that one of the reasons this speech was excluded and further references to the Constitution fell away from official discourses is because it could be used to substantiate the call to civic duty being advanced by liberals, students, intellectuals, and others who were growing increasingly aware of the impacts of corruption on their lives, the land on which they lived, and future generations. This type of civic duty and love of one's nation is dangerous to an authoritarian regime intent on maintaining harmony. The *lack* of its inclusion in the collection of Xi's speeches is telling.

The threat of civic duty is also apparent in Xi Jinping's recent campaign to redefine nationalism in a manner distinctly different from civic duty. This is a bold and potentially dangerous move given past lessons on promoting nationalism. However, Xi pushes on via a variety of tactics. Xi's "politicized anticorruption purges of rivals, centralization of

power in his own hands, cultivation of a populist image, and an ideological turn toward nationalism and cultural identity" are, for Xi, "absolutely fundamental shifts necessary to address the crisis he sees facing China" (Minzer, 2015, para. 9). Moreover, since many elite attribute China's past decline "to the weakening of the state authority," the strengthening of the nation through a unified nationalism is seen as an antidote to another decline (Zhao, 2015, para. 4).

Thus, Xi has put forward such unifying ideas as the "China Dream," in which China becomes prosperous and culturally rejuvenated. However, as French (2015) points out, "Unintended, even undesirable consequences are the name of the game in matters of state and...it is a safe bet that [Xi's] drive to realize a Chinese dream will produce many things he could never have dreamed of—or desired" (para. 4). One may be civic duty—a nationwide call to the collective.

Xi has also increased the level of anti-Western sentiments in official discourses as well as policies. For example, in 2014, Xi praised blogger Zhou Xiaoping for his critique of American culture as a negative influence on the Chinese people (Wong, 2014) and, "in his efforts to promote ideological unity, Xi has also labeled ideas from abroad that challenge China's political system as unpatriotic and even dangerous" (Economy, 2014, para. 10). In terms of policy, anti-Western sentiments are apparent in his recent proposal to crackdown on international NGOs in China, which could restrict foreign donations and subject the organizations to heavy surveillance, making operations increasingly difficult, especially with limited funding. Many scholars see his vigilance against Western influence as "a guiding component of his policies toward the Internet, traditional media, culture and entertainment, universities, think tanks, and non-governmental organizations"

(Zhang & Pho, 2015, para. 4). I would be remiss to not point out here that these displays of anti-Western nationalisms, when examined closely, can also be seen to contain pro-Western themes as well, as China looks to the West to borrow certain capitalist practices, adapting certain ones for China while rejecting others (Zhang & Pho, 2015). To see the regime as simply anti-Western pulls scholars back into dangerous binaries that obliterate the subtleties of these sentiments and campaigns. However, these themes are important to analyze.

A mutation of anti-imperialist nationalism is also apparent in the military parade that occurred in Beijing in September of 2015. In the weeks and months prior to the event, memorials to commemorate the fallen were erected while "[p]ublishing houses and studios [were] churning out books, documentaries and even cartoons on the period, with names such as *Lies Written by Bayonet, Tunnel Warfare and Great Victory*, [and] *Historic Contribution*" (Phillips, 2015a, para. 10). The military parade commemorated the 70th anniversary of China's victory in its war of resistance against Japan, which is a way of constructing China simultaneously as victor and victim—as victim of Japan's invasion and as victor over Japan (not just militarily, but economically).

In his speech during the parade, Xi stressed both *China as victor* and *China as victim* when he told the people:

> The victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression is the first complete victory won by China in its resistance against foreign aggression in modern times. This great triumph crushed the plot of the Japanese militarists to colonize and enslave China and put an end to China's national humiliation of suffering successive defeats at the hands of foreign aggressors in modern times. This great triumph re-established China as a major country in the world and won the Chinese people respect of all peace-loving people around the world. ("Full text of Chinese president's speech" 2015)

People from around the country watched the broadcast live and conversed with one

another over social media as the ceremony unfolded. Of course, the posts spanned the gamut from expressions of nationalism to cheap jokes about former president Jiang Zemin looking like a toad, but there was a strong presence of what appeared to be genuine nationalism (Fergus, 2015).

According to Professor Li Hui, many people, "especially those among the older generation and lower classes, have been highly inspired by this type of nationalism, and expressed their love of their strong country" (personal correspondence, 2015). In some cases, those who did not emphasize nationalism were ridiculed. For example, a popular Taiwanese star posted a photo of her son on her personal Weibo account on the day of the parade and was criticized by followers for not talking about China's "great achievement" and choosing to focus on herself and her family instead.

These appeals to various forms of nationalism, I argue, more than expressing anti-Western sentiments or pride, evidence a growing fear of losing control over the masses. This also explains Xi's various social media policies intended to prevent *huo,* or fires, from spreading evident in the 2014 rule stating that users whose posts were considered to be "rumors" and reposted over 500 times could serve punishments of up to 3 years in jail (Economy, 2014). Users in China (including myself) have also experienced difficulties connecting to censorship circumventing apparatuses such as Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) for long periods of time. In January of 2015, Gmail users could no longer access their accounts on smartphones because China was blocking IMAP and POP servers. Information controls are shifting and tightening in new ways at the same time orders are being passed down that forbid discussions of certain topics in educational institutions.

Xi is facing monumental problems alongside a swelling popular awareness of

national issues, and environmental challenges are one of the most pressing. Many Chinese people have chosen to approach environmental challenges and the corruption that enables it via a commitment to civic duty. Whether or not Xi can direct civic duty to become a productive form of nationalism that unites the country while at the same time solving environmental issues without risking the stability of the country remains to be seen.

Supplementing Network Theory

Two dominant forms of contemporary nationalism I have discussed here are 1) the brand of nationalism promoted by the central party and 2) civic duty. Xi's version of nationalism requires the formation of numerous committees to define and promote nationalism, an anticorruption campaign to restore China to its right place, the collaboration of the government with businesses to change censorship practices that delete unsanctioned expressions of nationalism, and the creation and promotion of media that promotes the Chinese dream such as the movie *Zhongguo Hehuo Ren* (**中国合伙人**) released in 2013 (which has been translated in English to *American Dreams in China* or *China Dream*[xix]).

At the same time that Xi is investing in these massive efforts, the people are developing their own forms of nationalism and are maintaining and promoting civic duty by establishing (E)NGOs, participating in illegal protests, going to jail, spreading information, stoking the fire of hope, becoming more educated about environmental laws, and reprioritizing environmental safety over GDP growth. Both are intended to stabilize and improve China, so to cast the clashing nationalisms in a binaristic and moralistic light

is unproductive. They are parallel and tangled, just as social movements are.

By examining *civic duty* and tracing its movement in Chinese culture as well as the tensions evident with its rise today, the importance of movement is foregrounded along with the networks by which movement travels. In other words, the black box has been opened and some of the relationships that compose, sway, and create nationalisms have been brought to the fore. One can witness how changes in flows of communication and governance, in particular, impacted the development, spread, and manifestations of nationalisms.

By avoiding binaries in this discussion, we have circumvented the forces that often prevent the black box from being opened. Eschewing rational/irrational binaries allows scholars studying Chinese protests to move away from a discussion concerning which forms of nationalism are legitimate and, instead, trace their force. By avoiding the democracy/communism binary, those studying social movements can move away from discussing whether or not a certain variation of nationalism will bring China democracy and, instead, study the changes China is undergoing on its own terms. By deflating the claim that contemporary nationalism is only anti-Western, we see how anti-Western statements work in parallel with an admiration of the West and a desire to learn from one's counterparts. Finally, moving away from depictions of China as a fully effective totalitarian hierarchy, the uncertainties of Xi's nationalistic agenda begin to surface and the *interactions* between these ideas, governance structures, the people, and networks begin to appear.

Answering McGee's call to trace force through ideographs, I have offered a tracing of civic duty within the Chinese culture that helps to foreground movement, networks, and

flows of information. Using Latour's notion of the black box to supplement McGee, I have illustrated how nationalism and civic duty are both unstable performances in constant flux, moved by relationships. This motion is what offers the appearance of the black box's constancy despite nationalism's many iterations.

In light of this, I argue for an ontological shift to more diligently tracing interwoven networks in motion. Rather than studying isolated events, I want to move scholars to follow the shifts, turns, and winds that reshape relationships and to see contradictory approaches occurring simultaneously. This ontological shift requires that we let go of linearity, hierarchies, rationality, and cohesion—the very ideas that have framed social movement scholarship for decades. If we look carefully, the consciousness of "the collective" is both disparate and divided. This new way of knowing requires that when we study social movements, we focus not solely on the event itself, but the winds that alter environmental landscapes, that shift networks, that propel movement.

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[i] According to the Paley Center for media, 90% of American households owned a TV by 1960 http://www.paleycenter.org/the-civil-rights-movement-and-television.

[ii] The fundamental flaw with Simons' piece is his leader-centered approach, which not only simplifies social movements, but also assumes that they are all leader-driven. By presupposing a hierarchical structure to social movements, his model can neither account for our contemporary mediated environment in which people are organizing and sharing over social media nor the multiplicity of leaderless movements that function more as a dynamic network than a neat striated structure, including Occupy Wall Street and the countless environmental protests in China. In the end, though Simons calls for new thinking on social movements, he falls back into the rut of looking to individuals giving speeches.

[iii] As can be witnessed in the work of Balthrop, Blair, & Michel, 2010; Blair, Balthrop, & Michel, 2011; Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991; Dickinson, 2006; Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2005; Endres & Senda-Cook, 2011; and Ott, Aoki, & Dickinson, 2011.

[iv] As can be seen in the following scholarship: Arnheim, 2004; Delicath & DeLuca, 2003; DeLuca, 1999, 2006; DeLuca & Demo, 2000; DeLuca & Peeples, 2002; Dunaway, 2008; Finnegan, 2005, 2006; Finnegan & Kang, 2004; Hariman & Lucaites, 2003, 2008, 2011; Hasian, 2012; Hill & Helmers, 2004; Mirzoeff, 2012; and Ott & Marie Keeling, 2011

[v] As is apparent in the following: Abel, 2008; DeChaine, 2002; Massumi, 1995; Ott, 2010; Seigworth & Gregg, 2010.

[vi] For example, scholars began looking at incidents such as the Young Lords Organization's (YLO) 1969 Garbage Offensive in which members, upset with the lack of trash pick up in their lower class neighborhood, protested by moving their marginalized trash to more highly trafficked areas to force officials to pay attention to the numerous requests that had been ignored (Enck-Wanzer, 2006). Bruce (2015) turns to Pussy Riot's staged protest at Moscow's Christ the Savior Church in 2012. Her paper takes this image event and then traces the affective impact of the use of the balaclava in subsequent demonstrations, ultimately gaining international iconicity. Gruber (2014), too, turns to the visual and affect in his analysis of the terracotta warriors exhibit in Hong Kong in which he explains how the multimedia display "appeals to the body and builds up a 'political affect,' a sensation or disposition toward Mainland China that is structured and enhanced by a larger narrative" (p. 163).

[vii] Stewart, Smith, and Denton define social movements as "organized, un-institutionalized, large in scope, promotes or opposes changes in societal norms and values, encounters opposition in a moral struggle, and it relies primarily on persuasion to bring about or resist change" (p. 23).

[viii] The number of protests per year (180,000) is based on 2010 numbers. Though current numbers are unavailable, most experts agree that the number has grown.

[ix] I use the word "ostensibly" because, as the Occupy Wall Street protests illustrate, local governments have repeatedly used various zoning laws to quash protests and force them out of public spaces.

[x] And, even with this more meta approach, I am leaving out many protest movements including those related to dams, trash, and numerous other environmental protests. Furthermore, the environmental movement cannot be restricted to protests alone, but also must include the work of ENGOs and individuals such as Chai Jing who produced the documentary, *Under the Dome,* which garnered a great deal of attention and made important waves in discussions of pollution and its impacts.

[xi] However, as can be learned from rash of race-related protests in 2015, the civil rights movement was not a simple linear progression and arguably is still occurring, long after the signing of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. To look at it as linear precludes the

possibility of seeing "alternate patterns or even no pattern at all" (p. 116 in Morris' book).

[xii] http://chinadigitaltimes.net/china/ministry-of-truth/

[xiii] Certainly, history scholars also confront this problem when they the materials with which they have to work with are mostly from a certain literate class in particular areas of the country.

[xiv] For example, when words and images were censored, protestors in Jiangmen in 2013 turned to the walkie-talkie function of Weixin, which allowed people to communicate via short recorded messages that were difficult to censor, as they would require that human censors listen to each message.

[xv] This return to intellectualism was exactly that—a *return*—and the literati had long had a role in keeping the government under check. According to Gries and Rosen (2004), "In traditional China, it was the literati who legitimated or de-legitimated the regime.... As interpreters of the political classics and custodians of the 'Mandate of Heaven,' the literati could and often did challenge the emperor's legitimacy claims" (p. 7). This is part of the reason why Mao attacked this class of scholars when he came to power and banishing some, while at the same time making use of others. The first intellectual revolution was the May 4th movement in 1919, which was led by students and intellectuals who challenged Confucianism and many tenets of traditional Chinese culture in the aftermath of China's downfall. These activists, looking for a way to pick China up out if ruin, believed that bringing in Western democracy and science would help China to rebuild and once again become a strong nation. The second intellectual movement began with China's opening up and reform and is still continuing today.

[xvi] Retrieved from: https://pubs.acs.org/cen/_img/89/i34/8934notw8protest.jpg

[xvii] Retrieved from: http://i.ytimg.com/vi/_Z1WPSv1_r0/0.jpg

[xviii] Retrieved from: http://globalvoicesonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/apx6.jpg

[xix] The movie tells the story of how three Chinese classmates were able to work the American college entrance exam system to help Chinese students gain entry in colleges abroad and make it rich in the process.

CHAPTER FOUR

SORTING CHAOS: WILD PUBLIC NETWORKS

"the more attachments it has, the more it exists"

(Latour, 2007, p. 217)

The rational/irrational binary has, since Aristotle's division of the soul into rational and irrational elements, guided and structured much of Western thought. It is the binary used to elevate humans as separate and distinct from other animals, to separate rational man from emotional woman, mind from body, and to distinguish "hard" sciences from the "softer" humanities among a host of others. This binary has been reinforced over and over again in vernacular discourses as well as academic disciplines from philosophy to science.

Though Descartes broke with Aristotelian thought in the 17th century in favor of a more scientific way of knowing the world, his famous "I think therefore I am," in ways, reinforced a similar rational/irrational binary. Again, this division established humans as the unique thinking animal.[i] This binaristic model also had other repercussions. According to Descartes (and many that followed), rational reasoning and logic were separate from and superior to any bodily feelings or reactions. The world was best known through science. Thus, the disciplines that were seen as employing only rational principles—science and math—were considered superior to the humanities. The

perpetuation of this hierarchy is evident in, among other places, contemporary funding distribution in the U.S. for research and scholarship, in particular. In 2014, total federal support for humanities focused programs was $594 million while the National Science Foundation (NSF) alone was given $7.17 billion for the same year (Mervis, 2014; National Endowment for the Humanities, 2014).

Formal definitions of the word *rational* help to elaborate on the ways in which it structures discourses within Western culture, which is important to understand before moving the analysis into China, where Cartesian dualisms have not been ingrained for centuries. The distinctions that undergird Western thinking need to be recognized as distinctly Western and not universal. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *rational* as "sensible, sane, lucid" and "characterized by reasoning, as opposed to emotion, intuition, etc." Here, emotion and intuition are posited as the very opposite of reason and sanity, the latter of which clearly sit on the privileged end of the binary. This trend is evident in a variety of Western texts. Gross (2006) is just one scholar who illustrates the long history of privileging rational thought by going back to the 17th century and tracing the treatment of affect. He finds that reason and the brain are characterized as superior to passions, which cloud judgment and cause confusion between right and wrong. The duty of humans is to overcome irrational tendencies (which are rooted in the body) through the rational power of the brain. Thus, the body and the mind became very separate and distinct entities in both scholarship and common parlance. Gries (2005) points out this distinctly Western line of thinking when he writes,

> despite compelling neurological evidence to the contrary, there is a strong tendency in the liberal West to view emotion and reason as locked into a zero-sum relationship in which any gain for one is a loss for the other. In other words, becoming more emotional entails becoming less rational and vice versa. (p. 88)

This privileging of rationality had diverse consequences, many of them as a direct outcome of positioning emotions, intuition, affect, and feelings as *ir*rational.

Structuralism, which emerged in the early 20th century, was a line of thinking that stemmed from a favoring of rationality and influenced the development of many disciplines, including communication (as is evident in the turn towards semiotics). Semiotics represented a very rational and scientific way of dealing with words by dividing them into different components (sign as signifier and signified). Structural thinking also proliferated across disciplines. Mainstream scientific scholars "appear to believe that cold rationality, fearless objectivity, and a bit of technology" are sufficient, whereas "excessive emotion about the object of one's study is a sufficient reason to banish miscreants ...on the grounds that good science and emotion of any sort are incompatible" (Orr, 2004, p. 43). In short, structuralism "represented a great revolution" in which "the whole world becomes more rational" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 130). As we saw in the previous chapter, a commitment to and belief in the power of rationality deeply influenced how communication scholars defined rhetoric and, thus, how they studied it. Those scholars who saw persuasion as the result of reasoned arguments focused their scholarly endeavors on speeches given by great rhetors, including Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King Jr., Barack Obama, and other high-ranking political and social figures.

Social movement scholars were responsible, in part, for pushing against this rigid definition to open up the study of rhetoric to include emotions, violence, image events, and the visual—all of which lay outside the purview of pure reason and rationality. Media scholars such as McLuhan fought against the dominance of rationality. McLuhan

(1964) attributes the privileging of linear thought to the emergence of print culture, which neatly aligns words on a page in distinct rows that are read from left to right, top to bottom. This is why McLuhan (1964) asserts that "'Rational,' of course, has for the West long meant 'uniform and continuous and sequential'" (p. 30). He goes on to argue that, within our print culture, we have "confused reason with literacy and rationalism with a single technology" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 30). This mode of reasoning, at the time of his writing (and more so now), thus considers inhabitants of the digital age to be irrational as we jump from link to link, image to image, and bounce around through search results, Twitter feeds, and Weibo blog entries.[ii] Thus, as scholars of social media, instead of clinging to ideal of linear rational thought, we should follow the erratic paths and lines of thinking. This turn is supported by recent developments in several academic arenas.

In recent years, disciplines including science and philosophy have come to argue that splitting the rational and irrational into two separate and distinct categories is misleading and inaccurate. Neuroscience has found that "reason may not be as pure as most of us think it is or wish it were, that emotions and feelings may not be intruders in the bastion of reason at all: they may be enmeshed in its networks, for worse and for better" (Damasio, 2005, p. xii). In his study of brain function in patients, Damasio (2005) finds that without feelings or emotions decision making, becomes virtually impossible, that "certain aspects of the process of emotion and feeling are indispensable for rationality....feelings point us in the proper direction, take us to the appropriate place in a decision making space, where we may put the instruments of logic to good use" (p. xiii). In so doing, Damasio helps to dissolve the rational/irrational binary that has limited scientific analyses of decision making and introduces a more ecological perspective in

which feelings are tangled together with systems of logic.

Philosophers such as Deleuze and Guattari (1987) also question the neat division between rational and irrational thought in *A Thousand Plateaus,* and make clear the intricate intertwining of the two:

> A new form of slavery is invented, namely, being slave to oneself, or to pure 'reason,' the Cogito. Is there anything more passional than pure reason? Is there a colder, more extreme, more self-interested passion than the Cogito? (p. 130)

For them, rationality and passion are neither separate nor opposite, but entangled. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) make this clear again when they argue, "The rationality, the efficiency, of an assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play, without the desires that constitute it as much as it constitutes them" (p. 399). The belief that the rational can be easily divided from the irrational offers space and justification for people to make quick and simplified judgments as to the validity or force of information and dismiss that which is irrational. For example, in sociology, the study of social movements almost dissolved when researchers deemed protestors as irrational and, thus, irrelevant and unable to be studied. In communication, protestors' lack of rationality also posed problems for the field. This is true as well in popular culture where many political commentators recently dismissed the possibility that Donald Trump could be a successful presidential candidate because his arguments lacked a particular type of logic and rationality. Much to their surprise, Trump has fared remarkably well in most polls, leading the competition by over 10 percentage points in October 2014, and it is not because rationality rules supreme. To trace the force of rhetoric, then, we must abandon arguments that privilege rationality.

We can witness the failure of rational arguments during the days and weeks

surrounding anti-PX protests in China. In Maoming, for example, the government anticipated popular discontent when plans for the PX plant were announced. In preparation, government officials launched a media campaign composed of a series of very rational arguments—a strategy that had some success in other towns. They passed out brochures explaining what PX is and how safe it can be. They invited experts from top universities on television news programs to explain the relative safety of the plant and held press conferences during which officials touted the economic benefits of the proposed plant. They used every communication channel possible to disseminate reasonable and rational information. These efforts to construct a very reasoned and rational argument fell flat because citizens were still stewing in anger and disgust about the rampant corruption that plagued the town, including the recent graft investigation that found widespread corruption within their local government a year prior. The force of anger and distrust trumped traditional rational rhetorical appeals. The people did not respond to these campaigns with rational rebuttals; they responded with protest and, in some instances, violence. To focus on only the rational arguments advanced would overlook the protests themselves. Furthermore, the Chinese people do not have the same adherence to rationality as the West. The Chinese people, those in Maoming included, are far more concerned with ethics. This is why corruption became a predominant discourse within the anti-PX protests.

A concern with ethics is evident in the interviews with protestors. Over and over again, interviewees from Maoming said they did not believe their government officials and, in some cases, that they did not pay attention to the government's campaign because there was no need; they already knew exactly what the officials would say and their trust

in them was lost. The carefully constructed campaign went unheard. People did not want to get their information from brochures or press conferences. Instead, they followed information that was spread via relationships over social media in the form of group chats with former classmates and coworkers, blog posts by local trusted experts, and forums that compiled snippets of information gleaned from reports out of Xiamen and Dalian about their PX protests. In short, they would only accept information from people they trusted and who were also looking outside state controlled mainstream media for information. Within this mass of data, sorting out rational and irrational arguments is impossible. Tracing movement and relationships, however, can help to make networks visible.

And this is the challenge: to move scholarship out of the rational/irrational binary that promotes a focus on pieces of information (which could be characterized as points) and stay focused on movement and relationships. Points are of less use in a networked study, as they allow us to fall back into arborescent models. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987),

> What constitutes arborescence is the submission of the line to the point.... A line of becoming is not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes between points, it comes up through the middle, it runs perpendicular to the points first perceived, transversally to the localizable relation to distant or contiguous points. (p. 293)

To follow the lines of becoming, of movement, I will first identify and explore tangles of activity. In this dissertation, I focus on the anti-PX protests that took place in Xiamen, Dalian, and Maoming, dedicating a chapter to each and also weaving them together. In these chapters, I carefully describe what I term *wild public networks* that coalesced to incite massive disruptions that changed relationships between actors, which includes not

only citizens and their officials but also ideographs, social media networks, websites, and land. Let us do away with the neatness of these binaries and begin to sort through the chaos.

Moving Past Binaries to Sort Chaos

In addition to structuring common, or vernacular discourses (Ono & Sloop, 1995), the rational/irrational binary has influenced how social movement scholars approach the question of how people are moved. This has resulted in a binary very similar to the rational/irrational binary—the rational/affect binary. However, this binary that privileges either affect or reason is problematic because it is not through one or the other that people are moved in a pure sort of way.[iii] It is, rather, through the intertwining of the two into a complex ecology that changes occur.

However, the turn to affect in studies of rhetoric (and all the other aforementioned areas) is quite distinct. Why is the turn to affect happening *again* and why is it happening *now*? One reason is that it was, for a long period of time, largely neglected in favor of reason. As scholars from across disciplines began to further explore how people came to change their minds, they came to find that rational reasoning oftentimes did not work. Leys (2011) draws the same conclusion in her review of the literature on affect, stating that,

> what motivates these scholars is the desire to contest a certain account of how, in their view, political argument and rationality have been thought to operate. These theorists are gripped by the notion that most philosophers and critics in the past (Kantians, neo-Kantians, Habermasians) have overvalued the role of reason and rationality in politics, ethics, and aesthetics, with the result that they have given too flat or "unlayered" or disembodied an account of the ways in which people actually form their political opinions and judgments. (p. 436)

More simply, despite much research and literature that push scholars away from binaries, the world in which we live is still deeply influenced by such structures. Thus, turning to the opposite of reason—affect—is a "natural" turn and one that has been immensely useful in expanding communication studies. However, if it persists as one end of a binary, it risks creating an artificial playing field that precludes adventuring outside the two ends of the binary where movement creates whirrs and buzzes that wildly extend, tangle, and clash. Affect would be more productively conceptualized not as a pseudonym for *irrational* or the opposite of *reason*, but merely one thread in a larger network that begs to be examined, or, as Leys (2011) argues, as that which precedes, but works in tandem with, cognition. To view affect as part of a network acknowledges that networks are "not made of nylon thread, words or any durable substance but...the trace left behind by some moving agent" (Latour, 2007, p. 132). Reason, in whatever form it takes, is always influenced by affect just as affective reactions are often channeled through the paths forged by reason.

Turning to networks, ecologies, forces, engagements, and relations can unshackle social movement scholars from yet another binary. The entreaty to move away from a reliance on binaries is evident in the network of poststructuralist scholars that upset the neat configurations imagined by semiotics, including Derrida, Deleuze and Guattari, Latour, Foucault, and an emerging extension of newer scholars, including Massumi, Hathaway, Gould, Jasper, DeLuca, Ahmed, van Dijck, Poell, and others. These moving theories offer a new ontology that expands the ideas put forth by the aforementioned authors that I term *wild public networks*. Within these wild public networks arise certain patterns and formations that provoke *forces majeure* capable of reconfiguring

relationships that I will further explore below as well as in subsequent chapters.

Wild Public Networks

The phrase *wild public networks* layers together a set of terms that, most basically, help to acknowledge the inconsistency of networks as well as their connection to most everything. Wild public networks connect scientists with real estate agents, students with ENGOs, polluting companies with cancer patients, PX plants with anxious mothers, and the fishing industry with the oil industry. Wild public networks emphasize growing, shifting, and messy relationships that crisscross through screens and streets.

Wild Traces

These configurations are wild in the sense that they are, by definition, "not tame, not domesticated" and are in a constant state of flux (*OED*). These wild configurations are similar to the wild public networks of protestors in that they are "resisting control or restraint, unruly"; they are "passionately vehement or impetuous" and "violently excited"; they are "excitedly desirous *to do* something" and may be considered to be "extremely foolish or unreasonable" or even "rashly or inconsiderately venturesome" by those who privilege a certain strain of logic (*OED,* emphasis in original).[iv] The Maoming protestors threw bottles of urine at the police and lit structures on fire. They were not acting rationally, but as people resisting, as people that were violently excited, as necessarily inconsiderately venturesome protestors.

The protestors discussed in this dissertation are often working outside the neat dimensions of organized arguments and approved legal processes in a desperate attempt

to do something. As this wild movement occurs, it extends the citizens' demands into new spaces, including officials' offices, journalists' smartphone screens, and QZone chat groups. The rhizomatic nature of protests invades the rhizomatic systems set up by corrupt officials creating conflict and opening up new spaces of possibility.

Wild becomes an important modifier because it stresses the lack of domestication, the deliberate turn away from neat systems of rules and laws, the many forms of violence that often accompany social change, and movement. In so doing, wild also encourages scholars to pursue that which lies outside domesticated binaries, and to embrace things overlapping in messy, moving arrangements. It provides an opportunity to see the disorder of the world, the chaos, and then to sort through it. It is what Latour might call a move from thinking like Crusoe to experiencing the world like Friday. He describes the difference between the two in "Irreductions":

> Friday is less certain about what is strong and what is ordered. Crusoe thinks he can distinguish between force and reason. As the only being on his island, he weeps from loneliness, while Friday finds himself among rivals, allies, traitors, friends, confidants, a whole mass of brothers and chums, of whom only one carries the name of man. Crusoe senses only one type of force, whereas Friday has many more up his sleeve. Instead of beginning my philosophical tract with a Copernican revolution—reducing the island to Crusoe's will—I therefore start from Friday's point of view and set things irreduced and free. (Latour, 1993, p. 156)

I, too, want to set the networks free and rather than focus solely on organizations or governmental authority, to trace this wildness—a movement DeLuca (1999) encourages in *Image Politics*.

Extending Publics

Wild public networks extend DeLuca's (1999; DeLuca et al., 2016; DeLuca & Peeples, 2002; DeLuca, Sun, & Peeples, 2011) concept of *(wild) public screens* and

Ewalt, Ohl, and Pfister's (2013) *networked public screens* by highlighting networks and relationships within a wild and unpredictable accumulation of forces. In taking DeLuca's concept of *wild* public screens and melding it with the *networked* public screens of Ewalt et al. I am not suggesting that wildness excludes what Ewalt, Ohl, and Pfister (2013) label (binaristically) as "tame" public screens (described as "the commonplaces of protest" and the circulation of "gentler images") (p. 187). Rather, I am acknowledging that wild public networks are often forged and maintained by banal communication including selfies, cat videos, and memes while also highlighting the movement and volatility of networks as they shift, change, and sometimes erupt. I am extending DeLuca's work by moving even further toward an emphasis on networks, which more explicitly privilege relationships rather than nodes, or screens.

In extending the work of this group of scholars, I am also furthering the argument that Twitter, Weibo, and other social media platforms trouble the rationality characteristic of the Habermasian public sphere, by displacing it with affective networks of panmediation that acknowledge the coexistence of rationality and affect (DeLuca, Brunner, & Sun, 2016; Ewalt, Ohl, & Pfister, 2013). China is a vibrant example of wild public networks because the spread of networked technologies, especially smartphones, force contemporary actors, including corporations, governments, and politicians, as well as citizens and activists, to engage with each other on public platforms and confront arguments that contain rational reasoning and affective appeals. Local government officials must confront and deal with the rumors that run rampantly across social media networks and often use their own official Weibo accounts to dispel them. When crises occur such as the protests discussed in this dissertation, networks of social media expand

exponentially and draw in both participants and onlookers. People confronted with the prospect of a chemical plant being built in their backyard turn to wild public networks to find information. The relationships they have built with others outside of crises often carry more weight than the ones they have with government officials. Rational arguments from local leaders fall on deaf ears while affective appeals run rampant across wild public networks.

Wild public networks, in turning away from a privileging of rationality, also highlight the creativity of Chinese citizens who use images, homonyms, and word play to circumvent censors and organize outrage. Chinese activists, having spent years deploying social media weapons in a surveillance society, provide models for citizens around the world. They meet surveillance measures the government takes to curtail conversations with a type of wildness that leaves censors scrambling. When words are censored, they use images; when images are censored, they deploy walkie talkie functions; when a certain phrase is censored, they replace it with one of the Chinese language's multitudinous phononyms. Networks of activated citizens overwhelm armies of censors, making spaces for successful activist efforts and offering hope through incessant creativity. Wild public networks highlight the pathways and relationships that link so many citizens together as contingent activists. Wild public networks offer scholars a concept that affords space to follow the unpredictable lines of flight that reverberate out during and in the wake of protests.

Wild public networks also, as previously stated, move from an emphasis on nodes to relationships. Within the spaces in between lies the potential for forces to move. According to Latour, networks are traces left by interactions and relationships, and

wildness animates these relationships, reminding us that they are constantly changing, moving, being redefined, being threatened, and exerting resiliency. Certain information and ideas—including the one that PX is a dangerous polluting chemical—run rampant like pests, appearing in places like Xiamen, Dalian, Kunming, Maoming, and more recently Shanghai, only to be attacked by government officials with a wide variety of pest control practices, including locally led media campaigns, expert testimony, censorship, press conferences, and empty promises. They can run rampant because pathways formed by relationships exist in composite conformations. Wild public networks emphasize that this study is one that focuses on relationships—between people and their air, local officials and the people they ostensibly serve, GDP and life.

Networks as Traces

Networks undergird the data collection, format, and analysis of this research. Though the rise of communication technologies have helped to advance the idea of networks as neat systems, I am advancing an idea of networks as messy, jumbled, and always moving. Furthermore, rather than emphasizing the computer or smartphone, I use networks to emphasize traces of interconnected events, or relationships.

Thinking of networks as traces requires an important shift from stability to movement and ephemerality. One can only trace after movement has occurred, and these traces are neither always obvious nor permanent. This falls in line with Derrida's (1988) theorization of traces as marking both presence and absence, as something which changes over time and never remains the same. To think of networks as traces is to insist upon acknowledging movement. *Wild public networks* are full of chaotic movements of

relationships and connections that are difficult to follow. These wild public networks include people marching, information being forwarded on QQ Zone and Weibo, Environmental Impact Statements, pressure on local officials to increase GDP, *guanxi* networks that make saying "no" to plans for a PX plant more difficult, and the affectively rational and rationally affective reactions that follow. This turn to webs of relations is consistent in poststructuralism and is apparent in Foucault's work, which argues that governments should be concerned with people, yes, but more so

> men in their relations, their links, their imbrication with those things that are wealth resources, means of subsistence, the territory with its specific qualities, climate, irrigation, fertility and so on; men in their relation to those other things that are customs, habits, ways of acting and thinking, and so on; and finally men in their relations to other things... (Foucault, 1991, p. 93)

These relationships connect all sorts of *things* in a variety of ways that acknowledge the complexity and messiness of their interconnectivity across multiple planes.

If we treat networks as traces, we find that rhizomatic extensions from the Xiamen protests crop up in Dalian and Maoming, producing offshoots of environmental awareness, civic duty, and misinformation that alter relationships between friends, officials, residents, oil executives, and environmental protection authorities. As they move, these new rhizomatic extensions confront the hierarchy of government officials who are connected with oil industries under a canopy of corruption. Wildly, these configurations clash and chaos ensues, systems that once worked are disrupted, networks that are carrying selfies are flooded with videos of riots and clashing bodies, and the rational decision to protest against a potentially dangerous chemical plant is overwhelmed by the affective reaction of watching police beat a fellow resident with a police baton (as was the case in interviewee Maoming 4, 2015).

What remains from the wild conflicts are traces—in the form of a reconfiguration and extension of connections often visible over social media in the form of demands, tirades, and accusations. The words, emoticons, and giffs popping up on mobile devices render visible inordinate amounts of data. As Latour argues, "information technologies allow us to trace the associations in a way that was impossible before. Not because they subvert the old concrete 'humane' society...[but because] they make *visible* what before was only present virtually" (Latour, 2007, p. 207, emphasis in original). We can now trace movement. We can watch the social move, jump, dissipate, and explode, throwing pieces of information in multiple directions.

If we turn to the protests in Dalian and Maoming, we have the ability to sort through fragments of video that were shared on QQ and Weibo that either were overlooked by censors, saved before they were deleted and reposted later, or which were picked up by local and national news outlets. We can read the handmade and computer printed signs and banners that proclaimed residents' love of their city, their opposition to the plant, and their awareness that pollution is threatening their lives and the lives of future generations. We also witness spikes in both activity on QQ, Weibo, and Weixin (though censorship makes collecting posts afterward difficult at best). Reports show that "although eventually censored, posts of the Maoming protests became one of the most discussed topics on social media" at the time (Shea & Reinsch, 2014). Both the central and provincial propaganda departments issued directives to the media to not cover the event. However, word still got out. Conversations about Maoming spread like *huo* (火), or fire across the Internet. In the 3 months before the protests, a Baidu search for "Maoming PX" produced 12 results. In the month after the protest (3/29/14-4/30/14), there were

over 760 results). Just over a year later on October 5, 2014, the same search produces over 3.35 million results. Wild public networks can carry information via a variety of paths and provide pathways to circumvent censorship.

Force Majeure

If McGee is right and the work of scholars is to trace changing ideographs and, to extend this, changing relationships, then these changes should be able to illustrate the movement of the social. If the social does not move, "it will leave no trace, it won't be recorded in any sort of document" (Latour, 2007, p. 53). In the case of protest events in China, the movement of the social can be located in the development of concepts such as civic duty, the proliferation of censorship evasion tactics like using *sanbu* (stroll) in place of *kangyi* (protest), changing relationships between the people and officials marked by increased interactions and new laws, and the development of further censorship and other tactics to tamp down activists' outbursts. Link and Qiang (2013) document these changes in their analysis of netizen slang, asserting that the

> Internet has become a quasi-public space where the dominance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is constantly being exposed, ridiculed, and criticized by waves of jokes, videos, songs, poems, jingles, fiction, sci-fi, code words, satire, and euphemisms. As a result, Chinese cyberspace has seen the emergence of a new political discourse. (pp. 79-80)

These changes can be mapped through such new discourses.

The territory we will enter is marked by chaos and awkwardness because "What is acting at the same moment in any place is coming from many other places, many distant materials, and many faraway factors" (Latour, 2007, p. 200). This creates a jumble of information that is, indeed, tedious to sort through but an appropriate one for studying

social movements and initiatives. According to Hathaway (2013), "cultivating an attentiveness to divergent strategies and actions" to "explore how social engagements are themselves generative of changing social formations" is a more productive route to take (p. 87). In his years of work with Chinese villagers in Xishuangbanna, Hathaway found that the studies conducted by organizations that relied on more arborescent models and methods fell short of explaining WWF's (World Wildlife Foundation's) impact on a local village (2013). Rather, by paying attention to the relationships and encounters between the people of the village, government officials, Westerners, and the WWF representatives, Hathaway (2013) finds that WWF's project plans were not simply a matter of implementation in which the organization forced its will on local villagers, but rather "transformed through repeated encounters" with a variety of actants, including government officials, crops, and elephants in ways WWF reports could not assess (p. 113).

By the very nature of taking a networked approach, social movements come to be recognized as "complex social systems" (Diani, 2011, p. 351) that are the "product of the connection and interplay of all the agencies and structures implicated in the movement" (Sullivan & Xie, 2009, p. 427). In examining the environmental movements that are weaving new connections across China, what becomes apparent is that these movements are not linear, they are neither successes nor failures, they are not led by any one individual or organization. Rather, they are amorphous networks that grow and transform while also transforming political processes, physical spaces, and ecologies—of thought, method, societies, and movement. Social movements are, necessarily, composed of a series of success and failures that shift, enhance, and redirect the movement.

It is important to note that, within this networked perspective, individual agency does not exist as "the deliberate use of individual will toward specific aims" (Hathaway, 2013, p. 156). Rather, as Latour puts it, a whole concatenation of actors, events, and "things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, block, render possible, forbid, and so on" certain configurations to emerge, but not others (Latour, 2007, p. 72). Presthold (2008) describes this as *cumulative agency,* which theorizes agency in a more dispersed way that considers it not to be solely relegated to humans. Hathaway (2013) turns to cumulative agency as a "way of understanding change" because it "is reciprocal and does not assume a fixed sensibility or goal but...can nonetheless have powerful consequences, as the combination of a thousand small, seemingly insignificant acts" (p. 157). The confluence of these seemingly insignificant acts is what I term *force majeure.*

Force majeure refers to an "irresistible force or overwhelming power" (*OED*) or literally, in French, "superior strength." It can also be translated as "force to be reckoned with," and carries with it a sense of helplessness against such force. While I do not want to suggest helplessness is inherent in social movements of this nature, I do argue that the protests that occurred in Xiamen, Dalian, Maoming, and elsewhere can best be traced if treated as a *force majeure* in which human agency is flattened to be on par with the force of other events and objects. *Force majeure* becomes an apt term to use for several reasons. First, as was previously stated, human agency is deemphasized—a move also apparent in Latour's (2007) adoption of a *flat ontology,* which is his way of "ensur[ing] that the establishment of any new link is clearly visible" by refusing to privilege human-to-human relationships over other relationships between things (p. 16). *Force majeure* also precludes the idea that there is a higher force at play, for as it reads in an

Encyclopedia Britannica entry from 1902: "The expression 'act of God'...is not synonymous with *force majeure;* but it includes every loss by *force majeure* in which human agency, by act or negligence, has had no [or little] part" (*OED*). *Force majeure* subverts the idea of autonomous human agency as the primary motivator of change.

Second, *force majeure* when examined in context is often used to invoke that which causes contracts to become null and void. For example, a war, earthquake, civil war, or radioactive explosion may render a contract between two countries regarding the usage of a particular plot of land nullified. As a result, the parties would have to renegotiate any further relations. In cases of the protests erupting across China, the protest-as-*force majeure* also disrupts the relationships and interactions between the people and their government and shakes the existing dynamics. People protesting in the street void the previous contract of civility between citizens and their government and government officials void their contract with the public when they engage in corruption.

To extend this further, in every case examined in this dissertation, the protests that occurred were illegal in that the people who marched in the streets did not obtain a permit from the government to hold a demonstration (or were refused it) and were warned not to participate by the authorities. The masses of people that flooded the streets and chanted were a force that broke numerous laws, but they did so in the face of the government's own violations of legal procedures. In every case, the government did not complete required aspects of the sanctioned procedures for building a PX plant that include conducting an environmental impact statement (EIS), following requirements that dictate the distance such factories must be built from residential areas, and holding a public hearing in which residents weigh in on the decision. Thus, the protests themselves are a

force majeure that requires a renegotiation of the relationships and practices of the people and their officials in its wake. It represents the termination of life as it is and the opening up of new ways of civic engagement.

Let us turn briefly to the 2014 protests in Maoming. The people of Maoming began protesting against a PX plant at the end of March. People flooded the town square, marched through the street, and the crowds of protestors drew even greater crowds of onlookers who flooded overpasses and balconies, bleeding together with demonstrators into ever larger masses of people. Video from the event shows the ebb and flow of activists as the police shouted through bullhorns and shot teargas into the crowds. People coalesced, moved backwards, dispersed, and wildly scattered only to reassemble again the next day. Images of the aftermath of one evening show the charred remnants of police posts still burning in the darkness.

Local officials resisted caving to the protestors, the violence, the rumors, the press, and the hum and buzz that reverberated from the event for several days. They fought back against the protestors with censorship, pepper spray, and commands to "clear the field." This rush to disperse people is typically employed when protests are seen as jeopardizing authority. Thus, "clear the field" also means that officials are panicked. However, protestors persisted in the face of danger, returning day after day to the streets.

After an intermittent stream of violence, anger, attention, crowds, and chanting, local officials met with a group of citizens. Behind closed doors, officials and citizens discussed what would happen next, what would become of the planned PX project. When the doors reopened, officials announced that plans for the plant would be halted.

In the interviews with protestors, evidence that this event altered relationships

between a number of actants can be found. For example, one protestor commented that after the demonstrations, his relationship with the air changed. Whereas previously he "thought it was nothing, if you just walk faster, it will be fine. Now we think: of course we should avoid this kind of pollution!" (Maoming interviewee 2, personal correspondence, 2015). The air has changed from something he can breathe without thinking into something that should be avoided, as something that can hurt all of the residents exposed to it.

The protest also changed the relationship between the people and their government. According to another person who joined the event as an onlooker, the protests "awakened people so they came to know their rights; they had a civic awakening" (Maoming interviewee 3, personal correspondence, 2015). For him specifically, this protest also forged a new relationship between him and his surroundings so that he now pays more attention to environmental issues and sees the oil tankers on the road as a reminder of Maoming's oil industry and the pollution it is causing. According to yet another witness involved in the protests, the events also continue to change the relationship between the people and their local and national media outlets. Decreased trust in public officials has led people to move from mass media to social media to find information about PX, the plans for the project, its level of threat, and what has happened in other places when people protested PX. The problem people must cope with is that "the contents of self-produced-media [social media] always cater to the will and aspirations of ordinary people; they stand by the people's point of view and express the ideas of the masses," which usually consists of their suspicions toward authorities (Maoming interviewee 4, personal correspondence, 2015).

The local media, which could be seen as having a more objective viewpoint, also struggle with coverage because

> all the local media outlets never learned how to deal with reporting these mass incidents. So even though the media is very sympathetic to the protests, and they sincerely wanted to promote the healthy development of public opinion, [they] have no voice in the outside world.... [they] cannot obtain the public's trust. (Maoming interviewee 4, personal correspondence, 2015)

The altering of the relationship between people and the media can be traced through numerous threads, which will occur in depth in later chapters. For now, it suffices to say that the rampant corruption among local officials rendered any official accounts suspect.

Through this cursory glance at the Maoming protests via participants, movement can be traced via the changes in various relationships. In subsequent chapters, I will more closely examine how treating the events in Xiamen, Dalian, and Maoming as a series of insignificant acts that coalesced to form a *force majeure* shifts the focus of the protest from deciding if the event was a success or failure to tracing connections and forces that mingled to create a schism between the people and their officials. It flattens the events in such a way that action is understood as something "not done under the full control of consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled" (Latour, 2007, p. 44). I turn to the protestors' and witnesses' reflections on their changing relationships because they were collected well after the protests occurred and the dust settled. They are traces of movement.

Wild Public Networks of Protest

Turning to mass uprisings and their role in generating force that is reshaping the landscape of citizen participation and cultivating a whole new ecology of political participation can help to advance studies of China's environmental movements. In tracing the movement that occurred after events like the ones that took place in Xiamen, Dalian, and Maoming, scholars are faced with the challenge

> to "follow the actors themselves", that is try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from them what the collective existence has become in their hands, which methods they have elaborated to make it fit together, which accounts could best define the new associations that they have been forced to establish. (Latour, 2007, p. 12)

Instead of "imposing some order beforehand," per Latour (2007) I trace, and in tracing "find order much better *after* having let the actors deploy the full range of controversies in which they are immersed" (p. 23). The pathways and connections that have surfaced as the dust settles allow for the mapping of movement, and this is where Latour and McGee and DeLuca and Jaspers and others all ask us to turn. We must map the movement.

This is why I have chosen to look into the deep tangle of traces that compose the events in Xiamen, Dalian, and Maoming and then link them together as an even larger tangle of events. This study seeks to foreground protests because they represent yet another component in China's environmental movement, which is also tied to economic, social, and political reform. Certainly, this study will not be exhaustive, but it will help to unravel the force of protest that has made important changes in relationships across the country. As I turn to the protests events to examine people with a sign proclaiming their nationalism in one hand and an iPhone moving the protests outside their provincial

borders in the other, tracing forces through wild public networks becomes an apt way of approaching these complex systems and sorting chaos.

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[i] As is indicated in the definition for *rational* provided by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "A rational being; spec. a human being, as opposed to an animal."

[ii] Much like film, public screens portray streams of information and "whatever the camera turns to, the audience accepts. We are transported to another world. As Rene Clair observed, the screen opens its white door into a harem of beautiful visions and adolescent dreams" that stray far from traditional textbook linearity and instead resemble erratic markings (McLuhan, 1964, p. 312).

[iii] Though to privilege affect for the moment is warranted, to a degree, as it has been largely neglected in communication for years.

[iv] Each quote is a separately listed definition of "wild" taken from the *Oxford English Dictionary,* italics in original.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AS *FORCE MAJEURE:* XIAMEN'S 2007 PX PROTEST

2007 was a landmark year in China. The coastal city of Xiamen made headlines in local, national, and international news outlets for a large-scale environmental protest against a proposed PX plant. Fearing their own safety and the safety of their children, their homes, and their environment, for 2 days, laborers, academics, farmers, industry workers, and students took to the streets en masse to protest plans to build a PX plant a mere 1.5 kilometers from the residential area of Haicang. At 8am on June 1 of that year, an estimated 10,000 people strolled through downtown Xiamen wearing yellow ribbons, holding banners, and some even donning gas masks. They shouted slogans and sang songs as they marched. Children walked alongside parents and grandparents. This gathering, although largely peaceful, caused leaders to shudder with the anxious fear that accompanies mass demonstrations in China. The result: local officials postponed plans for the PX plant. This event forced leaders to listen to the people.

In the weeks and months that followed the protest, officials were forced to follow the rules they initially circumvented. "In contrast with their hitherto secretive and aloof behavior, the local Party-state moved to actively engage with citizens" by "agreeing to consider public complaints and comments via channels including emails, letters and

telephone calls" (Johnson, 2010, p. 440). Local officials also conducted an EIS and made an abridged version available for public comment. The EIS deemed the plant unsuitable for the proposed location. The people participated in the public input processes that followed. Within the first 24 hours of the mandatory 10-day consultation period, authorities received 691 phone calls and 1,250 emails (Johnson, 2010). An online poll launched by local officials made obvious that the majority of people were against the plant with 55,376 of the 58,454 votes cast opposing the project (Hung, 2013). The public hearing that occurred the December after the protests also exposed a majority opposition. Lu Zhangong, the current Party Secretary of Fujian Province at the time, commented "In the face of such public opposition, we need to enter into careful consideration of this project. We should look at the problem using the principles of the scientific view of development, democratic decision-making, and valuing public opinion" (as cited in Hung, 2013, p. 50). Officials proposed to move the plant to Zhangzhou shortly after the public hearing, which China's Environment Protection Ministry approved in January 2009.

China scholar, Elizabeth Economy (2010), likened this protest to the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests in both size and significance. Press in China and the U.S. alike covered the event, framing it as a triumph for environmentalists. Chinese news outlets including *Sina News* and *Xinhua News* proclaimed it a "win-win" for the people of Xiamen and the government as well as an example of "cooperation between the people and the government" in which the two grew together (Hua, 2008, para. 1). In 2007, the "Xiamen people" were collectively named *Southern Weekend's* "Person of the Year" (Du, 2013). The Xiamen protests were the first highly visible case in China in which the people used

social media to organize outrage to shut down plans for a plant and local officials acquiesced to the people's demands. Xiamen's triumph would eventually inspire other cities to oppose PX through protest as well.

The story of Xiamen has been told and retold in both international and domestic newspapers and on blogs, BBSs, and social media. This is evidenced in the sheer volume of stories available about the protests. A Baidu search for "Xiamen PX protest" ("*Xiamen PX kangyi*") in November of 2015 (conducted in China without a VPN) produced approximately two million results. The government could censor all of the information available online, but they do not. Though all of these results and iterations of Xiamen's story exist, I want to tell the story of Xiamen yet again in a way that traces the wild public networks that made possible this uprising. This makes three major contributions to social movement scholarship. First, the Xiamen protests help to broaden the notion of protests as a composition of people with unified intentions because its participants were diversely motivated to engage in risky forms of protest. Instead of turning to discourses of unity, I consider them as assemblages so I can trace the complex concatenation of actors, events, and things that "might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, block, render possible, forbid, and so on" the *force majeure* that would coalesce and erupt on the screens and streets of Xiamen (Latour, 2007, p. 72). In short, I am moving from protest as rational consensus to disorderly *polysensus*, which I define as disparate motivations. This move from consensus to polysensus allows scholars to 1) consider the diverse motivations of protestors and 2) include nonhuman actants and systems including mobile devices, computers, economics, housing prices, global media outlets, and notions of environmentalism and civic duty. These can be traced as concurrent forces that

coalesce in a cacophonous uproar.

Second, I want to move scholars toward more networked analyses of protests that consider the various repercussions that follow in the wake of protests. Rather than assess protests based upon the goals intended by the assumed unified group of protestors, I propose taking a networked approach that considers the various ramifications that reverberate out from the event in unpredictable ways. In doing so, I am following McGee's (1980) call to study social movements by tracing the movement of the social in many different directions. This is an invitation also taken up by DeLuca (1999), DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun (2012), and Enck-Wanzer (2006), who each favors more complex analyses of social movement. This method, I contend, is especially well suited for studying protest in China, where decentralized protests beget dispersed results.

Finally, I want to explore the Xiamen protests as a *force majeure* to further elaborate on the concept. Protests as *force majeure* emphasize change over, through, and to wild public networks, which expand, contract, and shift in response to the force of mass uprisings. This move expands on Lim's (2012) call to consider "movements over a broad geography and longer space of time" (p. 234). Furthermore, it emphasizes both the coalescing and aftermath of protests. This approach contemplates social media as "tools and spaces in which various communication networks that make up social movement emerge, connect, collapse, and expand" (Lim, 2012, p. 234). At the same time, it acknowledges the simultaneous flux of economic networks, expansion of environmental awareness, and the movement of the story over national and international newsfeeds.

Social Movements, Cohesion, and Democracy

In order to make this first move in which I shift from the treatment of protests as uprisings of unified actors to moving assemblages, I argue for a move away from framing social movements as 1) largely cohesive phenomenon and 2) always leading to Western style democracy. First, let us look at the tendency to emphasize cohesion in social movements, when they are often rather fragmented. The mainstream media is accustomed to defining a movement by locating its objective and leaders, and then assuming that all of the people involved have chosen to participate because they support a particular set of goals. For example, the Keystone XL pipeline protests were portrayed in the media as united fronts of various disparate groups, including Native American nations and college students who wanted to protect a piece of land by stopping the PX pipeline from being built. The ENGO 350.org largely led the movement, with an official spokesperson—Bill McKibben—at the helm. Organizations used social media to organize people to protest, encourage peaceful resistance, and guide participant's behavior when arrest was likely. During the protests, which were held in the nation's capitol, Washington, DC, McKibben and others frequently took to the podium to make speeches and unite the crowd in common opposition. In some cases, protestors were arrested, but violence never broke out between the participants and police.

The people were portrayed as unified. This is typical in both mainstream media and academic essays. For example, in his essay on the Keystone XL protests, Hestres (2014) analyzes the movement through public figures, organizations, and instrumental goals. In describing the two groups that eventually merged—350.org and 1Sky—he focuses on their stated objectives and those who stood behind them. He then moves to emphasize the

group of actors most likely to be active in the movement and their "near-unanimous consensus...about the ideal target of both organizations' communication and mobilization efforts" (Hestres, 2014, p. 329). This analysis does not present a complex social system. Instead, it focuses on simplified readings of the events without taking into consideration the various factors at play that made possible this particular protest at this time. Many other questions could help to provide insights into the study of social movements. For example, the Keystone XL pipeline was not the only pipeline under construction, so why did groups focus on it rather than a different pipeline? What forces outside of organizations made possible this movement? Did the social move? If so, how?

Though McGee (1980) cautioned against assuming a "correspondence between one's membership in an organization and one's universe of attitudes and beliefs," there is still an assumption made in contemporary social movement studies that participation in a movement reveals a particular set of beliefs (p. 235). Furthermore, these sets of beliefs are often associated with a particular trajectory of movement often labeled as *progress toward democracy*. This is problematic because, as McGee (1980) puts it, using the term "social movement(s)" as a phenomenon "causes us to order social and historical facts such that we can maintain the illusion of 'morality,' 'purpose,' and 'destiny'" (p. 237), which limits scholarship. Certainly, as will become evident below, the 2007 Xiamen protests were not pure in terms of morality or purpose. However, there is a continued trend in social movement scholarship to focus on ordering social movements as unified and pure rather than detailing the polysensus that often characterizes them or the complicated coalescing networks that make possible the eruption of protest.

Lim (2012) emphasizes unity in her definition of social movements "as networks of

people brought together by a common goal or interest" (p. 234), which tames the wildness of social movements. Similarly, in Chavez's (2011) piece, she focuses on how disparate groups of people "connect issues and minimize divisions where divisions might otherwise be expected," thereby focusing on consensus rather than disparity in motivations (p. 14). As Phillips (1996), Ranciere (2010), and others have argued, dissensus is an important characteristic of democracy. I extend that to consider polysensus and an important component for consideration in moving the social.

However, polysensus is largely overlooked in protests. Rather, the trend toward cohesion can be witnessed in Asenas et al. (2012), wherein the authors do acknowledge divergent opinions, but the actors ultimately came to a consensus via in-person group meetings and discussions (or deliberative processes). This emphasis on unity and reaching consensus, while an important component, overlooks diverse (and sometimes self-serving) intentions, which are often discounted components of many social movements. Though some analyses do acknowledge disparities in motivation (see Brouwer, 1998; Cloud, 2009), they deserve more attention and elaboration.

Furthermore, I argue that the focus on consensus and unity (unwittingly) transforms disparate groups into a collective/individual actor that then creates change, which is problematic if we are taking a truly poststructuralist approach wherein the idea of the individual human actor as singular change agent is problematic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Latour, 2007). The notion of humans as individual change agents overlooks the amorphous networks that connect humans to the land on which they reside, the changing political systems, the cumulative agency of smartphones, social media platforms, and the one child policy. This is why I turn to assemblages, which take into consideration

nonhuman actants and networks. Tracing social *movement*—which is what McGee (1980) asks us to do—through assemblages opens up space for a more nuanced analysis of the competing interests that compose social movement. It also moves scholars away from individual agency to Presthold's (2008) notion of *cumulative agency,* which theorizes agency in a more dispersed way that considers not only diverse motives, but also nonhuman actants.

The second issue at hand is the tendency to implicitly or explicitly assume that social movement is always moving toward Western style democracy (Hartnett , 2011, 2013). While I do argue that the protests in China are transforming the relationships between the people and their government, I do not assume that the changes occurring will result in a transition to Western forms of democracy. Rather, I agree with Xin (1993), who argues that the public sphere is being "insufficiently operationalized" then applied to "the Chinese case," with little to no explanatory power (pp. 51-52). As such, scholars "run the risk of getting involved in an ideological or teleological exercise in which the Western model of development is merely projected onto China," instead of seeing China in terms of China (Xin, 1993, pp. 52). Habermas' (1991) theory of the public sphere, which explicitly privileges deliberative democracy, has directed thinking about social change, but this framework is not universally applicable. However, numerous contemporary studies of social change in China are chained to the development of a public sphere, arguing that its emergence signals democracy is imminent (Lagerkvist, 2006; Rankin, 1993; Yang & Calhoun, 2007).

I argue that the public sphere is ill suited for social movement studies in China, first, because it privileges order and rationality, making accommodating the decentralized

networked protests occurring throughout the country difficult. This tendency to privilege order is evident in the repeated focus on NGOs in discussions of environmentalism in China (Tang & Zhan, 2008; Yang, 2005; Yang & Calhoun, 2007; Zhan & Tang, 2013). As a result of this emphasis, protests are left largely understudied and undertheorized, despite the fact that they are widespread and influential, with between 250 and 500 protests occurring each day across China, most of them environmentally driven (Human Rights Watch, 2013). To overlook these protests wherein tens of thousands of people take to the street without leadership is to neglect the events that are transforming the ways in which people are interacting with their government.

The second reason a Habermasian notion of the public sphere is problematic is that it privileges rationality. Assuming a democratic trajectory is problematic for scholars studying the movement of the social, but another major issue also emerges. The particular form of deliberative democracy proposed by Habermas leaves "aside a central element, which is the crucial role, played by passions and emotions" (Mouffe, 2000, p. 10). Mouffe takes issue with Habermasian deliberative democracy in numerous publications (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; 2000, 2009, 2013), and its privileging of rational arguments: "the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus possible, but to mobilize those passions towards democratic designs" (2000, p. 16). People will never be able to divorce themselves from affective allegiances, which is why she puts forward a new model of democratic practice she terms "agonistic pluralism." In so doing, Mouffe (2009) highlights the dissent and democratic contestation that is so essential to "the multiplicity of voices that contemporary pluralist societies encompass" (p. 105). Her point is well

made and necessary to contemplate the transformations occurring in a country like China. This dissensus Mouffe speaks of is also inherent in the movement of the social, as multiplicities of voices moved by passions, emotions, as well as scientific arguments all end up on the same protest route, shout similar slogans, and hold banners.

The importance of emotion and passions as rhetorical force is apparent in communication studies in discussions of violence. As Harold and DeLuca's (2005) study of the images of Emmett Till's mutilated corpse make evident, violent acts can advance "an explicitly rhetorical agenda" (p. 268). In the cases of the protests discussed in this dissertation, violence is both the result and cause of affective reactions that draw ever increasing numbers of protestors to the streets and stoke further opposition. Violence and the anger that it incites is inherently messy and moves people in ways that rational arguments cannot. Fan et al. (2014) made this apparent in their research, which found that anger was the emotion that spread most rapidly across Weibo.

Thus, we must map erratic networks teeming with varied voices rather than trace only solidarity. We can acknowledge and follow affect and violence as powerful rhetorical forces. We can move away from assuming that deliberative democracy is the inevitable end goal, thus allowing for other political possibilities. As a number of scholars have argued, deliberative democracy may not be the ideal system for environmentalism (Zhang & Barr, 2013). Take, for example, the air pollution that strikes Salt Lake City, Utah, every year. Though scientific studies have shown that 38% of the dangerous particulate matter that collects in the city's valley comes from cars and trucks, people have not yet united to place restrictions on driving during heavily polluted days (Dinha, 2013). The democratic system can function to protect individual interests over the common good.

This is not to say that socialism is environmentally friendly. China's brand of socialism has also created widespread environmental crises via poorly thought out directives such as the ones Mao put in place. China's turn to capitalist practices has also wreaked havoc on the environment. The proliferation of government backed State Owned Enterprises (SOE) tied to oil and chemical industries makes opposition to such polluting projects increasingly difficult, for people are simultaneously battling the industry and the State. Ultimately, neither democracy nor socialism inherently privileges the environment. In fact, their dependence on economic growth has made environmental degradation profitable in the short term.

By tracing a more complex movement of the social, I am actively opening up space for considering new forms of government emerging in China without trying to name it. Though the transformations in government have been theorized by a number of China scholars and policy watchers (MacKinnon, 2011; Teets, 2013), I argue these scholars are too quick to name a new form of government. This move to name the changes curtails possibilities for future movement. Thus, this dissertation does not seek to identify and name a new governmental system. Rather, I am tracing movements and changes. In order to consider more seriously social movements in China outside of Western ideals, I propose examining the protest in terms of assemblages.

Assembling Assemblages and Wild Public Networks

In this chapter, I explicitly use Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of *assemblages* to guide the analysis. By turning to assemblages, I am tracing amorphous components of wild public networks. In analyzing the 2007 Xiamen protests, I looked to historical texts

about Xiamen, news reports in Chinese and U.S. outlets, online blogs, and communication with protest participants. These resources consider human and nonhuman influences and systems as I trace the movement of the social.

According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), assemblages are multiplicities that are always connected to other assemblages. They are constituted by "elements (or multiplicities) of several kinds: human, social, and technical machines, organized molar machines; molecular machines with their particles of becoming-inhuman.... Each of us is caught up in an assemblage of this kind" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 36). Humans, smartphones, social media platforms, and media outlets all coalesce as assemblages. Importantly, such assemblages are also always in motion: "assemblages are in constant variation, are themselves constantly subject to transformations" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 82). They do not stand still, but morph and extend, grow and recede, crisscrossing to form wild public networks. Looking at events such as protest in terms of assemblages allows scholars to map the movement of the social by tracing the composite of forces, or assemblages without being tied to cohesive motives or specific democratic assumptions. This way of looking, this ontological framework, makes space for considering both eruptions (here, in the form of protest) as well as "the combination of a thousand small, seemingly insignificant acts" as all contributing to the movement of the social (Hathaway, 2013, p. 157).

For the purposes of this chapter, I trace three overlapping and intermingling assemblages: the political/academic/economic assemblage, the global/digital media assemblage, and the environmental crisis/civic duty assemblage. I chose these assemblages because they were important components linked to fomenting the protest

and assemblages that were altered in its wake. Within and among these assemblages, the economy, online access, chemical plants, text messages, mobile networks, and communist ideals weave together. Before I delve into the assemblages, I first want to offer a brief background on Xiamen to help set the stage for the subsequent sections.

Xiamen as an International Network

Xiamen is a small island on the southern coast of China in Fujian Province. It has an international feel to it, which stems from its past. In the early 1800s, Xiamen was an important entry point for opium, which brought with it foreign dealers and revenue. After opium was made illegal, many traders continued to smuggle the product in through Xiamen, which forged new paths of trade along the same lines. Xiamen was an important place of convergence.

In 1842, after the first Opium War, the British forced the Chinese to open Xiamen as one of the first five foreign treaty ports in China. As a result, Xiamen remained a place of trade for not only international goods, but international culture as well. In the subsequent decades, which witnessed a great deal of war and change, Xiamen was invaded and occupied, largely due to its location on China's periphery as well as its importance as a place of traffic and trade. After the Communist Party took over in 1949, they invested significant resources in Xiamen to make it part of the mainland by building a bridge in 1956 and connecting it the same year via rail. In 1980, the government designated Xiamen as one of four Special Economic Zones. Its coastal location and livability were seen as lures for foreign trade and investment (Ansfield, 2013). As a result, tourism, trade, and real estate grew to become important components of Xiamen's economy.

Understanding Xiamen's draw is easy; the town has the air of a tropical paradise.

Xiamen is a city characterized by massive banyan trees and lush gardens, one where the University sits adjacent to a Buddhist temple, where the sounds of chanting monks meet the calls of vendors selling plump mangoes from their carts outside the gates, and where lush tropical trees thrive in an atmosphere saturated with moisture. Xiamen University itself is more like a garden than a campus with fruit trees lining the sidewalks. In autumn, the branches hang so heavy with fruit that students can pick their offerings on the way to class. Adjacent to the university is the Wanshi Botanical Garden, which is home to approximately 6,300 different kinds of tropical and subtropical plants and 20 different ecological zones. The park is expansive, covering over 2.3 square kilometers with winding trails that meander through the dense green foliage. At the edge of the skyscrapers that congregate at one area of the coast are expansive stretches of white sand. The coastline is combed every evening to remove debris washed up by the waves or left by careless tourists so swimmers who arrive the next morning to plunge into the ocean are met with a clean beach. The boardwalk that traces the ocean seems to go on forever as do the wide bike lanes that flank the roads. Recycling bins are neatly placed along the boardwalk and tourists can rent bikes to explore the city. Xiamen has become a popular destination for domestic and international travelers and, over the years, it has also flourished as a place for destination weddings. During one of my visits to Xiamen, I counted no less than two dozen couples having their wedding photos taken along Xiamen's stretches of beach in one afternoon.

Gulangyu Island, which sits across from Xiamen, is a small island that came to house the foreign settlers after Xiamen became an important treaty port. After the first Opium

Wars, a dozen different foreign consulates were built on the island and the missionaries who settled there built their own churches. Chinese who had made fortunes overseas also returned to the island and built British style mansions with walled gardens. According to Brown (2005), a U.S. citizen who was stationed at Gulangyu and then made Xiamen his home, authors such as Hutchinson "wrote that Gulangyu had more wealthy people than anywhere on earth except Pasadena, California" in the 1920s (p. 4).

As a result, Gulangyu has a very unique feel. As visitors today stroll the streets, they will confront vendors selling trinkets outside of European houses and pass by Buddhist temples and Christian churches on the same street. Known as the "Garden of the Sea," Gulangyu has become a popular tourist destination renowned for its green space. Visitors can take a ferry across the strait to explore the mansions and gardens via meandering walkways and quiet streets. The narrow and steep roads that run between the walled gardens were never meant for wheeled traffic and, to this day, bikes and cars are not allowed on the island.

The Xiamen that exists today is the result of a concatenation of factors that made the emergence of an environmentally minded city possible. The economic priorities encouraged by Xiamen's designation as a Special Economic Zone made housing and tourism a priority for the city over industry. The influx of international residents that settled over the routes forged via opium, the tea trade, and war created a community in which diverse and disparate sets of values flowed and circulated within the boundaries of the city. The space created by the protests in 2007 further influenced what Xiamen could become. The tumultuous shift in power from officials to an assemblage made of academics, migrant workers, investors, environmentalists, citizens, and officials had

dramatic and diverse repercussions for the land, people, and policies. The *force majeure* that occurred continues to have repercussions on China's contemporary environmentally driven protests. In the next sections, I will trace the assemblages that coalesced to erupt into a mass movement.

Xiamen's Political/Academic/Economic Assemblage

Xiamen University was founded in 1921 by an overseas Chinese businessperson. Since then, Xiamen University (XU) has flourished. In the 1990s, XU and was selected to participate in the central government's Project 211 and Project 985. Project 211 is an initiative developed in 1995 as part of China's fifth Nine Year Plan (1996-2000) aimed at facilitating the development of higher education alongside social and economic developments. As a result of the defunding and delegitimization of science during Mao's regime, a great deal of work was needed to rehabilitate science related fields and higher education, especially if China wanted to be competitive internationally. Thus, China began investing heavily in higher education. Just a few years later on May 4, 1998 (a symbolic date referencing the May 4 Movement), then President Jiang Zemin launched Project 985 in order to develop "first-rate universities of international advanced level" ("Project 211 and 985," 2016, para. 5). In 2004, the program expanded to include Xiamen University. The influx of money helped fund research centers, upgrade facilities, hold international conferences, and attract world renowned scholars to campus with higher salaries and better resources. On their website, Xiamen University boasts 2,601 fulltime faculty and professional researchers, 10 research institutes and research centers, and a number of scholars and former students who have since achieved international accolades.

The economic boost to the XU played a major role in its development and trajectory.

Xiamen University's presence and status has, in turn, helped to diversify the surrounding city by bringing in academics from some of China's top universities as well as well-educated students from across the country. As the school has grown, so too has the number of academics, scientists, lawyers, and engineers living in the island city. This then impacted the socioeconomic makeup of the city, bringing in ideas, talent, and money from surrounding areas and diversifying the city's intellectual makeup.

As academics moved to Xiamen in more recent decades, they entered an environment in which real estate prices were steadily rising. After Xiamen was designated a Special Economic Zone, Deputy Mayor Wang Jinshui's goal was to develop "industry while concurrently managing tourism, trade and real estate," which he did (Zhang, 1986, para. 7). In just 5 years (1990-1995), Xiamen doubled the number of tourists to the island, over doubled the average local income, attracted important and lucrative international business contracts, and developed "390,000 square metres of workshops and luxury living quarters for overseas business people" (Zhang, 1986, para. 13). Thus, academics and others entering the Xiamen real estate scene had to invest a great deal to afford real estate in this up and coming city. For a number of buyers, purchasing a home in Xiamen meant that they were investing decades upon decades of family savings. Unlike most U.S. homebuyers who take out loans to finance their property acquisitions, Chinese investors often pay for homes up front with savings passed down from generation to generation. Moreover, the home they do buy is seen as an investment for the their child's future and will remain in the family. By passing it down to one's daughter or son, the family is helping to secure a better future for their child and grandchild. Furthermore, because

China has had a one child policy up until the end of 2015, passing down a substantial inheritance that would accrue in value is extraordinarily important. This is imperative to understand as I discuss the weeks and months preceding the protests.

I term these intersecting circumstances the political/academic/economic assemblage because, as will come to light over the course of this chapter, the university, political circumstances, and the economy overlap in ways that are crucial to the provocation of Xiamen's *force majeure*. Furthermore, combining these together emphasizes how changes in the intellectual makeup of the city impacted the economic circumstances and how the political events provided opportunities to garner support, forming an important force in the Xiamen protests. This method also helps to provide a foundation for thinking of the events that would follow as an accumulation of agency.

The forces that compose this assemblage are evident in how the protests were provoked. First, Dr. Zhao Yufen, a Taiwanese professor of chemical biology at Xiamen University who also has an appointment at Tsinghua University (China's top science university), discovered plans for the PX project before they were highly publicized. She was privy to the information for certain reasons that will become clear later in this paper. Zhao did not want the plant to be built in Xiamen and took the proposal, along with her objections, to the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) in Beijing, China's top advisory body. This conference coincided with the National People's Congress conference, which is the highest law-making body in China. This dual meeting attracted a great deal of media attention in China because those watching wanted to know which new laws would be passed.

Zhao was well aware that, in bringing up this issue, it would gain nationwide

attention. She was also aware of her authority as an academic in the sciences as a member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Since most attendees were unaware of what PX was, Zhao's framing of it would carry a great deal of weight. Thus, she was armed with important information, and her status as a member guaranteed her voice would be heard. Zhao knew that the plans for the PX plant violated federal laws dictating the distance it needed to be built from residential areas. According to Zhao, PX has been linked to birth defects, nervous system damage, and cancer, and would endanger Xiamen citizens. Her case, by appealing to the laws set forth by the central government and backed by her scientific standing as a professor of chemical biology, was a strong one. Moreover, she had the political and academic standing to bring it to the central authorities by submitting a petition that was signed by 105 CPPCC signatures to suspend and relocate the project (Hung, 2013). Zhao's petition, ultimately, was not supported, but the issue *had* garnered media attention.

This information made headlines in the *China Business* newspaper via an article titled "Dispute over the Safety of the Xiamen PX Plant" on March 18, 2007, but local Xiamen news outlets were not able to carry the story. Zhao's framing of PX as extremely dangerous drove the coverage. Eventually, through blogs, BBSs, and word of mouth, information trickled into Xiamen. Once word began spreading about the proposed PX factory and the potential dangers that accompanied it, word also spread that housing prices would drop across the island should the factory be built. This meant that real estate agents' salaries would plummet and those who had bought houses in Xiamen would potentially lose a portion or all of their family's investment. Their children would have nothing. This loss also threatened investors from Hong Kong and other surrounding areas

who had purchased real estate in Xiamen. Panicked and angered, this new population of well educated middle class Xiameners was quick to oppose the plant. Online blogs warning of the impending housing market drop fueled their outrage. Homeowners gathered together and petitioned the local government to cancel plans for the plant, but their request on paper was met with silence (china.org.cn, 2008). The channels intended to handle citizens concerns was, for all intents and purposes, nonfunctional in this case.

Plans for a PX plant drew the attention of Dr. Zhao, who had been recruited to Xiamen University to teach and research. Her presentation of her academic assessment of the proposal and of PX at a major national conference ignited opposition at the local and national levels. The potential impact on the local economy that had been built through political initiatives created unrest among those who now depended upon the industries created by Xiamen's designation as a Special Economic Zone. The information flowed between and among academics, real estate agents, and politicians via the global/digital media assemblage, which I will discuss next.

The Global/Digital Media Assemblage

Interwoven through the political/academic/economic assemblage is the global/digital media assemblage, which had been forming new connections between people for over a decade when the protests took place, linking people in Xiamen to one another, media outlets, and international reporters. Tracing this assemblage helps to make apparent the networks that were forming to carry information and how they moved information within the political/academic/economic assemblage.

In 1994, Chinese Internet users were introduced to Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs),

which quickly developed in popularity, in part, because they allowed users to post and comment anonymously, which meant "members tend[ed] to be frank on sensitive issues and users no longer [relied] on the elite or intelligentsia to represent them, but [tried] to make their own voice heard" (Ye, Sarrica, & Fortunati, 2014, p. 890). Unlike English language users who largely abandoned BBSs with the advent of social media, BBSs continued to be "extremely popular in China, where they have attained a surprising level of sophistication" (Kuo, 2009, para. 8). Part of this popularity is driven by commerce. Businesses find them to be an important tool in gauging user attitudes toward their products. In fact, by the January of 2009, 80% of the 1.5 million commercial websites had a BBS attached, and these boards were often the most visited part of the site (Kuo, 2009). Users also participate on BBSs to air grievances, talk politics, and complain about local issues. China's

> BBS forums go beyond online boundaries and have a profound influence on Chinese society by prompting political engagement and challenging traditional social or cultural ideologies, as well as creating spaces that nourish civility and social bonding. (Ye et al., 2014, p. 890)

BBSs allowed users to connect and share in different ways, which caused an explosion of chatter and participation. As Hung (2013) argues, "We are now witnessing citizen journalists and bloggers...increasingly providing a prompt and interactive platform for the expression of public and elite opinion to be exchanged, disseminated, and debated" (p. 44). By 2007, Xiamen, which was home to a large number of middle class residents who had access to computers, had a healthy contingency of bloggers and users who consistently posted and read BBSs, including local boards like "Xiamen House" and "Xiamen Fish." This is where citizens discussed local issues and engaged in debates.

Lian Yue (the pen name of writer and social critic, Zhong Xiaoyong), one of the most

well-known and widely read local Netizens at the time, interacted with other bloggers and users and played an important role in stoking the PX controversy online. He brought the news that was released in *China Business* to Xiamen. Lian Yue was clear in his opposition to the plant and encouraged his fellow citizens "to break the information blockade and to save themselves" (Hung, 2013, p. 46). He penned a list of 12 measures, which included the following: "Do not be afraid. Discussing the...[PX] proposal is not a crime; you will not get arrested," "If you have a blog or visit BBS often, please post this news by *China Business*, entitled 'Dispute over the Safety of the Xiamen PX Plant,'" and "This is a chemical plant opposed by 105 CPPCC members, some of whom are authorities" (quoted in Hung, 2013, p. 46). He encouraged discussion, provided readers with information via the *China Business* article, and let people know CPPCC members supported Xiamen. Lian made information that was unavailable via traditional media outlets accessible and the people were reading and engaging with him online. One resident was quoted as saying "He is our spiritual support" (china.org.cn, 2008, para. 41).

At the time of Lian's post in March 2007, many people had yet to hear of the PX plant and the dangers it posed for citizens. After this and many subsequent posts and after people shared stories and reports in chat rooms and on message boards, awareness grew exponentially. The people of Xiamen did tell their friends and family, who told their friends and family. Awareness spilled from blogs to street corners. Opposition grew and could grow because the pathways forged by the Internet linked people who would otherwise never meet. It also helped spread information that would never have been printed in official local newspapers or magazines. It linked people to a story in *China Business* that was not making it into newsstands in Xiamen. The Internet networks were

integral to disseminating information in an environment in which the media is state controlled. Yes, the government also monitored the Internet, but the people were generating the content in an environment in which the laws were ambiguous and users were anonymous.

These networks "provided individual Chinese citizens various horizontal digital communication networks, enabling them to initiate discussion and conduct deliberation regardless of spatial and temporal limitations" (Liu, 2015, p. 570). Overlapping relationships between groups of people helped move the information. According to O'Brien and Stern (2008), "In difficult circumstances, prior ties take the place of more formal structures and reduce barriers to participation 'by opening channels for uncensored materials to circulate [and] diffusing the risks of association'" (p. 17). Information flowed through *guanxi* networks, linking bloggers, academics, real estate agents, students, and government workers.

In this case, the existence of an infrastructure of Internet users was an important component of the assemblage that made possible the circulation of materials and, ultimately, social movement. Many of the interviewees emphasized the importance of the Internet in spreading information and awareness. According to one interviewee, "On the Internet there was a ton of small group discussion about PX, a lot of people left comments there" (Xiamen interviewee, personal communication, 2014). Comments as such make apparent the fact that people were not only reading expert opinions, but also asking questions and participating in the discussions with peers. Another interviewee stated simply, "All of the news concerning PX was online" and that is where a lot of people went (Xiamen interviewee, personal communication, 2014) while another asserted

that "[The Internet] played a leading role... all of the news was posted online and could be obtained there" (Xiamen interviewee, personal communication, 2014).

This high level of participation on BBS is corroborated in official statistics. In 2008, just a year after the protests, 98.2 million Chinese citizens visited BBSs, 96% spent at least 1 hour a day on BBSs, and 98% of users participated on these platforms (IWOM, 2008). In this dispersed network, hundreds of nodes were disseminating and connecting information simultaneously and rhizomatically, thereby weaving around and through the hierarchical government controlled media and creating new networks.

The lack of information in local media outlets was suspicious. Even if residents did want to learn about PX, little information could be obtained via traditional media. Not until May 29, 2007, did the *Xiamen Evening News* publish a report that included interviews with the city's local Environmental Protection Bureau. The gates were then opened and local media released a rush of propaganda that touted the PX project as an economic windfall for Xiamen residents. This one way propaganda push further moved discussions online, where people could communicate freely. The global/digital media assemblage expanded and exploded, creating new channels and pathways by which information could travel.

Affect Over the Global/Digital Media Assemblage

As was discussed above via Mouffe, in investigating political arguments, communication scholars must consider the force of affective appeals. These can be traced on blogs and forums including Lian's posts, which included important scientific information, but also affective pleas. One such example was his warning to residents that

if they took no action and allowed the PX plant to be built, they would be "considered weak and dim-witted" (Hung, 2013, p. 46). Other affective appeals proliferated in chat rooms and on QQ, but the most potent affective appeal was disseminated via text message.

As of 2007, mobile phones had spread widely and the middle class people of Xiamen were pulling them out of pockets and purses regularly to call and text. When the following text message was sent out on May 25, 2007, it spread like wildfire leaping from one flip phone to the next:

> The Taiwan-funded Xianglu Group has begun building a PX plant. *It is like an atomic bomb in Xiamen. Many people will suffer leukemia and more babies will be born with congenital defects.* A paraxylene project should be at least 100 kilometers from a major urban settlement, but we are only 16 kilometers from the project. For the sake of our future generation, please forward the message to all your friends to demonstrate in the streets on 1 June 2007. ("Xiamen people vs. chemical plant," 2008, emphasis added)

And forward they did. This message was repeated more than one million times via text message and echoed on blogs, reaching the majority of Xiamen's 1.5 million residents (Landsberg, 2007). It spread so far so fast that it could not be censored or stopped. This inflammatory text message, which was an exaggeration of scientific findings, became a force that moved people to gather in the streets on June 1, 2007 and drew the attention of government officials, panicked by the threat of a mass movement.

The conversations about PX and a potential protest, which were effortlessly moving across city, provincial, and national borders, drew reporters from Hong Kong, Australia, and the U.S. to report on the gathering. Those from other cities in China could follow the protests in real time by checking blogs for updates. One post read: "There's at least over 10,000 people here, the march is on! People keep joining in along the way, the procession

keeps getting longer. More and more people can be seen wearing yellow ribbons" (Kennedy, 2007, para. 11). Some U.S. reporters were present at the march, and brought news of the event and images to U.S. outlets (Cody, 2007; Landsberg, 2007; Martinsen, 2007). Unable to ignore it as information spread via blogs and BBSs across the country, some state-sanctioned mass media also covered the event.

As time passed, the story kept extending and multiplying and moved from city to city from mouth to mouth and phone to phone. As social media spread, the legend of Xiamen's success began to travel across these new networks via affective intensities, helping to incite protests against PX projects as well as garbage incinerators, wastewater pipelines, and nuclear power plants in cities far from Xiamen's shores. Xiamen's story, though it took on many different iterations and details as it traveled, transported one fundamental idea: protestors in large numbers could interrupt government plans.

Environmental Crisis/Civic Duty assemblage

As the political/academic/economic assemblage increasingly overlapped with the global/digital media assemblage and began extending its tendrils beyond campus and high priced highrises into the neighborhoods of Haicang (the proposed neighborhood for the plant), a new awareness began to blossom in Xiamen that connected civic duty to environmental protection. Many residents of Xiamen grew up in a society in which the Confucian values of working together and providing together were deeply ingrained. Chinese culture has long promoted a commitment to the collective, or a sense of civic duty (*gongmin yiwu*) discussed in Chapter Three, which instills the practice and belief that one must be willing to sacrifice on the individual level for the greater good. This

became connected to environmental protection with the simultaneous rise of the middle class and widespread environmental degradation. As people had the resources to pull themselves out of poverty, they also cultivated the level of awareness necessary to recognize the impacts of industrial pollution. In Xiamen, where there was a larger contingency of middle class residents, this level of awareness was particularly high. Many of the interviewees gestured to this sense of civic duty, saying that this sense of civic duty drove their participation in the protests rather than a more specific variety of environmentalism. Environmental protection was seen as necessary for the greater good.

Blogger Lian Yue pointed this out when he wrote: "Xiamen citizens have a stronger sense of environmental protection" (Landsberg, 2007, para. 6). He was right, as is evidenced by respondent's testimony that the people of Xiamen are, generally speaking, more highly educated and have a higher degree of civic awareness. The connection between a commitment to civic duty and environmental protection is also evidenced by the existence and strong presence of a local ENGO—Xiamen Green Cross.

By 2007, Xiamen had long been home to Xiamen Green Cross (XGC), which is recognized today as an important and influential organization led my Ma Tiannan (also known as Ma Azure). Though not "official" until 2007, the organization had been operating informally since 1999 in response to a typhoon that hit Xiamen's coasts that year. Since then, it has developed to become an organization that coordinates events to encourage recycling, discourages driving, and works to keep Xiamen's waterways clean. In addition to engaging the community on the ground, XGC's mission is to influence policymaking that promotes greener lifestyles. XGC has previously launched or participated in a number of different environmental and climate protection campaigns and

projects, including Island Care Day (2000–2013); Green Commuting and Low Carbon Action (2006–2013); the Energy-Saving Campaign (2008); the Climate Change and Low-Carbon Economy Project; and, the Law-Based Environmental Advocacy Project (2012–2013) (Kuhn, 2014). XGC has been recognized for its work in the form of grants and awards, including a Ford Motor Conservation and Environmental Grant (2006); the China Youth Toyota Environmental Protection Award for Excellence (2006); and the Ford Motor Conservation Award for Energy Saving and Emission Reduction (2010) (Kuhn, 2014).

XGC has done much of this work with just four to five staff members and a handful of volunteers. In addition to leading XGC, Ma is also a council member of the Xiamen Environmental Science Association and the Fujian Lifelong Education Association as well as a consultant to the Shishi Youth Volunteer Association, the Green Commuting Network of the Environmental Defense Fund, and coordinator for China's first ENGO, Friends of Nature (Kuhn, 2014). In short, she is very active in the national environmental movement, which helps to connect XGC to other ENGOs across China. When asked why she engages is work with such long hours and low pay, she responded that it is her duty to the people of Xiamen to do this kind of work.

As the only ENGO in Xiamen at the time of the protests, XGC became an important resource for frightened residents unsure of what to believe about PX. However, as a registered NGO, XGC could not make an official statement regarding the protest because to do so would jeopardize its status as an NGO. This is a problem all NGOs in China face, as "it is difficult for Chinese NGOs to strike a balance between upholding the environmental concerns of citizens, advocating for climate protection [and other

environmental concerns], and not provoking the local government" (Kuhn, 2014, p. 68). The fact that hoards of people came to XGC's doorstep asking for information is testament to its importance in the community and the work they had done to raise environmental awareness. People were aware that environmental degradation would ruin the home they loved. However, XGC was unable to guide public opinion directly, thereby redirecting people back to Internet discourses. The most important work they did was in raising awareness before the protests, so as to set the stage to rouse high levels of concern regarding environmental issues.

This increasing environmental awareness met a long tradition of civic duty, which influenced the tenor of the protests, as is evident in how the protests were framed via slogans and songs. When people protested in Xiamen, they did not protest *against* the government as much as the protested *for* the protection of their city, their land, their country, and future generations of Xiameners. Banners did not read "down with the government," but instead "We love Xiamen" and "resist the PX project, protect city residents' health, protect Xiamen's environment." Protestors belted out not songs condemning China, but the national anthem and other ballads tied to their regional identity (Swarthmore College, 2011). A group of seventy senior citizens reportedly were chanting "for the next generation, we don't mind settling accounts this late in life, it's worth it!" (Kennedy, 2007, para. 15). They were willing to sacrifice themselves for the greater good.

Civic duty, or personal sacrifice for the collective good, is also apparent in the fact that people protested. By participating in a nonsanctioned protest, many people were putting their freedom and livelihoods on the line. Residents were willing to sacrifice this

for Xiamen. Interviewees, when asked why they participated, responded with statements like the following:

> Because it is the people of Xiamen's duty and obligation. I am from Xiamen, I have lived my whole life in Xiamen... I went to join this protest because of my love for my city. I didn't want my city to have a plant that could be dangerous to the people [who live here]. (personal communication, 2014)

Another interviewee echoed this sentiment when he stated, "My own living environment is very important. Using action to fight for the environment is worth it" (personal communication, 2014). While many diverse factors were at play, for a large group of people, this protest was about exercising their duty to one another and their home.

A commitment to civic duty and a growing environmental awareness were forces essential to igniting the protests in Xiamen as well as the community involvement that followed. As I will further explain below, the event itself was marked by polysensus that was all directed at the same outcome: the PX plant should not be built in Xiamen. Some people were in opposition to save their financial investments, others were concerned about the impacts of the PX plant on their children, still others were afraid their home was going to be destroyed. These dissonant forces worked in tandem with the rising middle class, influx of academics, spread of digital networks, and adoption of mobile technologies. Together, they coalesced, creating the capacity necessary for the 2007 *force majeure* that would alter China's environmental trajectory.

Tracing the Polysensus of Protest

The reasons for protesting in the streets were far from pure and uniform, and must be considered in this analysis. As was made evident above, people motivated by the threat of plummeting real estate value and rumors of PX being akin to an atomic bomb marched

alongside people exercising their civic duty. The divergent reasons for protest extend even further. According to Ansfield (2013), the academic from Xiamen University, Dr. Zhao Yufen, who spearheaded one of the earliest resistances did so, at least in part, because she had a competing interest. Sources in Xiamen report that Zhao's family business had been promised a plot of land on which they planned to construct a biopharmaceuticals plant. However, after they had begun investing in the project, the government took away their plot of land and gave it to the company proposing the PX plant. Angered about this, Zhao used her political standing as a CPPCC member and respected scientist to drum up opposition to the plant at the annual CPPCC and NPC meetings. Since few, if any, people had the scientific background to understand PX and it impacts, her framing of the chemical and her decision to label PX a dangerous chemical responsible for cancer and birth defects became a major factor in inciting outrage locally. It was, however, an assessment many experts allege was an exaggeration of potential hazards. In fact, some local experts allege she misled the public in order to deepen the opposition, a move that would help to return the plot of land to her family's business. This framing of PX, which was viewed as credible, was then cited in future uprisings and came to shape how people perceived PX in cities across China.

Another factor often unaccounted for in stories of Xiamen's success was the fact that a private businessman from Taiwan, Chen Yuhao, was funding the plant via his company, Xianglu Dragon Group. Though officials did not want to damage their relationship with a wealthy entrepreneur like Chen, it was much easier to urge him to move the project than it would have been to persuade a state-owned industry to forfeit the money they had invested and find another location. Additionally, after officials decided to cancel the

plans in Xiamen, they moved the plant to a Zhangzhou, a city due west. Selecting Zhangzhou as the new site for the PX plant meant that the revenue from the project would stay in Fujian province, which was extremely important to local officials interested in increasing the province's GDP. Since Zhangzhou was a much smaller city, officials knew they likely would not face the same fierce and widespread opposition they did in Xiamen where the assemblages of academics, businesses, Internet access, and environmental awareness were pregnant with force. Furthermore, according to one interviewee originally from Zhangzhou, the government warned residents not to protest or they would face severe consequences. Though protests did occur despite this, the plant was successfully relocated without much press coverage of the protests or relocation.

Another important aspect to consider was that the real estate agents who feared losing their jobs, according to both news reports and testimony by interviewees, paid some older residents of Xiamen to participate in the protests. Their stakes in the movement against PX were high enough to warrant a financial investment to increase the numbers of protestors and the pressure for local officials to listen. These people marched alongside business people and environmentalists.

These details were not widely circulated on mass media or digital media for a variety of reasons. Sympathetic journalists masked Zhao's selfish motivations (Ansfield, 2013). Citizens unfamiliar with environmental practices and policies were not considering why a protest against a privately owned factory would be different than one against a state owned factory. They were just fighting. And, while awareness about the procedures mandated by the central government that played a large role in postponing construction of the PX plant spread across Xiamen as citizens involved in the fight battled it out with

their officials, these details of the story were largely eclipsed by the perceived success of the protests in mass media and online outlets. The force of the event lay (and lies) in its ability to disrupt the world as the Chinese people know it, to affectively move people in other areas to stand up for their city, and to make room for new enactments of citizenship.

Protest as *Force Majeure*

This melding of assemblages, together, fomented this event, which then had its own force. To understand the rhetorical significance of the event, we must trace these forces. Rhetoric, rather than being concerned with meaning or content, I argue, should be focused on "its capacity to exert a compelling force" (Muckelbauer, 2009, p. 17). Or, put as Sillars (1964) put it, "rhetorical acts, concerned as they are with effecting change, involve in part the use of force" (p. 280). If scholars trace force, we can map repercussions of the protests outside of simply whether or not they accomplished their goal. We can see that the narratives of Xiamen spread virally across the country, to inspire protests not just against PX, but against nuclear power and waste incinerators, and how it served as a vehicle to spread information about environmental rights in its wake. Many forces reverberated outward in many directions, which is a distinguishing facet of social movement. As Massumi argues, "Strains, obstructions, and resistances mark the continued formative pressure of the quasi-chaotic manyness" of activist events (Massumi, 2011, p. 5). Since social movement is characterized by "manyness," it is important to retain this in analyses.

With this in mind, I look at the Xiamen protests as a *force majeure* to study this movement of the social outside rational arguments and deliberative democracy. *Merriam*

Webster defines *force majeure* as "1. superior or irresistible force; 2. an event or effect that cannot be reasonably anticipated or controlled," which, in use, may operate to excuse a party from a contract. By operationalizing this term, I am tracing the forces that led up to the protests, the ways in which protests are forcing a renegotiation of the contracts between local governments and chemical companies, as well as the relationships between the people and their government, and the forces that emanated from the protests. In this final section, I will revisit assemblages described above to outline how force is articulated via networks. I will then outline how this leads to renegotiations before tracing the impacts.

A *force majeure* is an "irresistible" and "overwhelming" force that moves, in this case, through networks. The networks forged via blogs, BBS, and cell phones linked academics to farmers to bloggers to real estate agents. As exaggerations, fear, and facts spread across the networks, they coalesced in various configurations to move people to action. These networks helped to gather real estate agents fearing a housing market collapse at the same time they helped to mobilize the an academic interested in building a biopharmaceuticals factory. The emergence of online platforms was able to connect groups with disparate motivations, allow them to stay true to these goals, and then still march along the same route as environmentalists and people paid to hold signs. The pathways constructed by blogs and cellphones carried waves of amalgamating polysensus that ultimately disrupted plans for the plant.

One reason people turned to blogs and BBSs was that information about PX was largely absent from mass media sources, especially in the early stages. The dearth of official information forced people to turn to alternate online networks. The information

they found online ranged from that which deemed PX to be dangerous, to what PX was, to the illegality of the plans for the plant. Though censorship ultimately occurred online, alternate routes including cell phones helped to circumvent these barriers. Outrage proliferated on these platforms despite attempts to stop it, interrupting the networks of corruption that allowed the plans to be approved and laws to be circumvented.

This leads me to explore a *force majeure* as something that nullifies existing contracts. In the Xiamen protests, the contract between the local officials and the Xianglu Dragon Group was not just altered by what occurred; it was broken. After the people in Xiamen took to the streets, the government was forced to renege on its promise to let Chen Yuhao build on the plot of land in Haicang, causing Chen to lose the money he had already invested in the project. Though the plant was ultimately relocated, Chen lost both time and money in the wake of the protests.

In Xiamen, after the protests, the relationships between the people and their government also changed. Though the leaders are supposed to serve the people, this duty had long been overlooked. Local officials in Xiamen were making decisions for the people without asking for their input or perspectives on environmental matters, which was illegal in this case according to national laws. However, in the wake of these protests, the people took back these rights by force and caused a renegotiation of the procedures in place. Local people were forcing officials to follow the rules. In so doing, they offered possibilities for civic engagement and interaction heretofore unseen. People speaking in a tone and volume their leaders could not ignore changed the tenor of their conversations.

Finally, protests as *force majeure* help to highlight various impacts of the protests.

Yes, the protests were successful is disrupting plans for the plant. However, the movement they initiated continues to reverberate. After the protests, people followed up with their government, demanded an Environmental Impact Statement be conducted, and expressed opposition in the public forum. This ensured that plans for the plant were never resurrected for Xiamen, and likely kept other similar companies from trying to establish factories in the area. In the years following the event, Xiamen has increasingly taken on the identity of an environmentally conscious city with numerous developing ENGOs, including Xiamen Little Gull and China Mangrove Protection Alliance. Xiamen University is also home to a number of university sponsored environmentally focused student groups.

The movement continued outside of Xiamen. Years after the protest, people from Dalian and Maoming stated that the Xiamen protests served as an inspiration and model for the protests in which they participated in 2011 and 2014, respectively (personal communication, 2015). When domestic and international press do cover PX protests in other cities, the Xiamen protests are often brought up as the first example of widespread opposition to PX. As the protests continue to erupt, they are always linked to Xiamen.

Changing Relationships, Changing Politics

According to China's environmental protection minister, as of 2009 "'[m]ass incidents'— or riots and protests—sparked by environmental problems have been rising at a rate of 30 percent per year" (Le & Hornby, 2009, para. 13). As the success in Xiamen was relayed over and over again, the force of the triumph inspired people in Jiangmen, Hangzhou, Qidong, Kunming, and numerous other cities across China to stand up to local

authorities and protest against pollution. Bloggers and citizen journalists recognize this. For example, blogger Du Jianguo (2013) states, "Without Xiamen's 2007 walk, the same types of events would not have been possible in Chengdu or Kunming" (para. 2). A citizen from Chengdu echoes this sentiment. Upon reflecting upon the protests in his town, the anonymous witness told the press, "We're definitely inspired by the events in Xiamen" (Wong, 2008, para. 21). By the time the people of Dalian protested against the PX plant that threatened their town in 2011, Xiamen was not the only success they had heard tell of in China, but still served as a beacon of hope.

Information about what happened in Xiamen continues to impact China's environmental movements as its success and subsequent victories circulate across Internet platforms, which are growing and extending at rapid rates. As resistances spread virally from one city to another, the residents of these cities are fundamentally changing their relationship with their governments through protest. These protests garner force through international publicity, affective appeals, and digital media networks. They are eruptions resulting from assembling assemblages, or assemblages *becoming*.

By examining Xiamen as a *force majeure* rather than a protest initiated by rational and unified groups of environmentalists, I have begun to explore a new way of studying social movements that presupposes neither deliberative democracy nor rationality. This model moves away from linear progressions to trace multiple becomings. This analysis focuses on the conglomeration of forces, or assemblages, that coalesced to move people to the streets, which moved the government to back down, and which inspires others to also fight against corruption using China's environmental laws. It examines protest through force. These rhizomatic eruptions are changing China, but not leading down a

path to a predetermined political system. What these eruptions are doing is igniting movement and cultivating a diverse ways of thinking, being, and doing, which will continue to shape China's trajectory.

CHAPTER SIX

THE DISAPPOINTMENT IN DALIAN

In describing the protests that provoked the mayor of Dalian to stand on top of a police van and announce that the city would move the Fujia Dahua PX plant off their coastline just hours after people began gathering at the Capitol building, the two young IT specialists sitting across the table from me said Xiamen's 2007 protests served as inspiration. They had heard about the people of Xiamen's success in stopping a PX plant projected to bring in $10.8 billion annually (roughly three fifths of Xiamen's GDP) from being built via newspapers, television, and BBSs (Ansfield, 2013). They saw information about the protests, saw that Xiameners succeeded, and thought they, too, could succeed. Xiamen's was the first case in China in which people used new media to protest. As a result of this mass mobilization, local officials bowed to the people's wishes and said "no" to industry. The two IT specialists with whom I spoke that day, and many others who came together to form the mass of over 10,000 people who took to Dalian's streets in 2011, had heard about Xiamen's triumph and wanted to duplicate it in their own city by lacing together outrage, hope, Weibo, bodies, and Baidu's *tieba*.

It seemed to have worked. Just hours after the protest began, the mayor promised to move the plant to a safer location. His impromptu speech was caught on video by the sea of smartphones that surrounded him and posted to social media immediately. The people

had proof from the mayor himself of their triumph. Several years after the event, when I visited in late 2014, it quickly became apparent that the mayor had lied. The people with whom I spoke told me that they did not think the plant was shut down for even one day and that it definitely was never moved, as promised. Their mayor had lied to them, to all the people that gathered in the square, and all the people who watched the events unfold online.

The event was a huge disappointment for the people of Dalian, many of whom had engaged in a very risky form of protest and some of whom had been beaten, jailed, and hospitalized. After talking to protestors and residents of Dalian, I too, felt deflated. The reports I had read while conducting my preliminary research did not describe the failure that had followed what appeared to be an amazing and rare success. Moreover, I had watched the video in which the mayor stood atop the van and acquiesced to the people and heard the crowds demanding details. The front page of the local newspaper carried news of the success. The government had won by lying to the people, dragging their feet, and waiting for the opposition to subside.

However, it was not that simple. Yes, the plant was never relocated, but the protests did both evidence movement and move the social in important ways. This chapter builds on the lessons from the previous chapter by moving away from conceptualizing protests as either a success or failure. It is, instead, an account of changes to what McGee (1980) calls "human consciousness," of how what happened in Dalian ultimately created social movement (p. 242). To do so, I engage in elaborate tracings of the circumstances that coalesced to erupt into a *force majeure* as well as the changes that occurred in its wake using, as was the case in the previous chapter, news reports from both Chinese and

English language outlets, blog posts, onsite research, and conversations with people who lived in Dalian at the time of the protests.

In looking at reports and following the protests on social media, the protests in Dalian were portrayed as a success. The vast majority of the news coverage occurred within the first several days of the protests. On social media, the news of the government bowing to the people was transmitted almost instantly. The people protested, they endured violence, but they won. As a result, the legend of Dalian, when it reached people in other cities confronted with plans for a PX plant, served as an inspiration. The people in Kunming, Maoming, Shanghai, and elsewhere saw what Xiamen and Dalian had achieved through mass mobilization and believed they could have the same successes. Just as when people from Dalian searched for "PX" on Baidu and found out what occurred in Xiamen, saw Lian Yue's blog posts, confronted images of people "strolling" the streets holding banners, and read that the plant had been moved, when people from Kunming, Maoming, Chengdu, and Shanghai searched for PX years later, they found not only reports about Xiamen, but reports about Dalian and their "success."

Two cities that were geographically, politically, and socially distinct had both won in fights against PX. Furthermore, the people of Dalian appeared to have won against a PX plant that was already built. When examining reports from other cities that staged PX protests, the protests in Dalian and Xiamen are repeatedly mentioned as protests that had paved the way for these subsequent mobilizations. The cases are also, however, oftentimes oversimplified. For example, reports of the protests do not discuss the details surrounding Dr. Zhao Yufen's family business, nor do they often talk of the people who were paid to participate. Some fail to mention that the plant was ultimately relocated to

Zhangzhou. The protests in Dalian largely discuss only the victory, not what came to be 6 months afterward. The reports, most of which are unofficial, are also littered with rumors and misinformation (Jia, Fanxu, & Shuo, 2014). Precisely because the stories were simplified and construed in a multitude of different ways, they had a particular force that persuaded and inspired others to also engage in similar forms of risky protest that travelled via relationships.

Much of the literature on social movements looks to events that are deemed successes because they achieved their instrumental end goal, as can be seen in literature from the civil rights movement to the environmental movement to the Arab Spring. For example, scholars who have written on civil rights campaigns have focused on successful speeches by great leaders, including Martin Luther King Jr. (Vail, 2006) and Malcolm X (Terrill, 2001). Others, including DeLaure (2008), for example, brought forward people who they perceive to have been overlooked in social movement scholarship, including Ella Baker, a woman whose radical rhetoric led to her success as a leader of the civil rights movement. These studies focus on how rhetoric was used to achieve an instrumental goal.

This tendency to talk about social movements in terms of instrumental success is also evident in both mainstream media as well as academic studies of the Arab Spring, which often look at the movement as a success and then debate the role of social media in its success (Christensen, 2011; Johnson, Nuseibeh, & Tudor, 2013; Kassim, 2012; Schleifer, 2009; Zuckerman, 2011). For example, Al-Rawi's (2014) essay on the Arab Spring examines the role of Facebook and YouTube in the victory of Iraqi protestors in convincing four top Iraqi officials to resign. It considers neither the relationships nor the

accumulation of forces that made possible this eruption. Yes, Facebook and YouTube were important, but they are but one actant in a network and this network was made possible by relationships.

The move to frame protest events within the instrumental success/failure binary is also apparent in lesser known initiatives. Asenas, McCann, Feyh, and Cloud (2012), for example, focus on the combined efforts to save Kenneth Foster from capital punishment. In the section of the paper titled "Anatomy of a Victory: Lessons Learned about Communication Activism Scholarship," the authors explain how the campaign to save Foster resulted in a judge commuting his sentence to life in prison, an instrumental success that justifies the study. This section addresses how scholars can learn from the instrumental *success* of the movement rather than acknowledging the multitude of forces that made possible that outcome.

While focusing on successes is warranted and necessary, scholar's analyses also must extend beyond examining events in terms of intended repercussions and incorporate failures as well (Golinski, 2005; Hughes, 2000). As Enck-Wanzer (2006) argues, "While the practical goal of rhetoric may be to persuade people to act in one way or another, instrumental 'success' may not be the best criterion on which to base our judgments" (p. 189). If, as McGee (1980) asserts, the work of social movement scholars is to trace the social, then we should be tracing the multiple repercussions of protests, of the protest as a *force majeure* that disrupts relationships and forces renegotiation in a variety of realms, rather than focusing solely on whether they were an instrumental success or failure. Instead, scholars can ask questions like: What changes did the event leave in its wake? How did it impact the social? And, in this case, how have the protests made possible new

ways of being in the world for those in Dalian as well as those across China?

Some work has been done to complicate the issues at hand and answer similar questions. For example, Pezzullo (2011) argues in her piece on boycotts and buycotts that it is "inadequate to judge them as 'positive wins' or 'negative losses'" and, instead, scholars must "consider the possibilities for change enabled by specific campaigns within specific contexts" (p. 139). This call to action, however, appears in the conclusion and could be further engaged. DeLuca, Lawson, and Sun (2012) complicate Occupy Wall Street beyond its achieving or failing to achieve instrumental success by tracing the repercussions the protests had on national conversations. They found that "in a mere few weeks, OWS changed the national conversation despite the initial neglect and dismissive framing by traditional mass media organizations" (p. 484). This study offers a means by which to trace diverse repercussions beyond the movement's instrumental success or failure. This more complicated perspective can also be found in Enck-Wanzer's (2006) essay on the Young Lord's Garbage Offensive, in which he complicates the movement beyond the success/failure binary by considering how the movement altered relationships and created possibilities for alternative futures.

By using the Dalian 2011 protests as a case study in this chapter, I will map the repercussions of the protests beyond the instrumental success framework. To do so, I will treat the protests as a *force majeure,* meaning that I will first describe the factors that coalesced to create this eruption. I will then elaborate upon the event itself before exploring the repercussions that vibrated out beyond the epicenter of the event.

An Explosive Past

The Fujia Dahua PX plant against which the people protested in 2011 was located on the shore north of the city of Dalian. Large dykes had been built to protect the plant in the event of a storm, but when a typhoon hit the coast in August of 2011, the dykes were broken and, according to many reports, the holding tanks were damaged and leaked dangerous chemicals into the water. This damage and the subsequent alleged spill may have been a result of poor construction. One person I met told me that he had been inside the Fujia Dahua PX plant and saw the components being used on many of the large storage tanks (personal communication, 2014). According to him, they were not of sufficient quality and, therefore, were less likely to withstand an accident. When the plant was built, corners may have been cut. The problem was not with the plant, but how it was constructed, he said. Its location on the coast made it all the more susceptible to damage from ocean storms that could lead to all sorts of leaks and spills that would then, in turn, pollute the water and everything to which it was connected.

The damage the Fujia PX plant suffered during the typhoon in August, unfortunately, was not the first time the people of Dalian had experienced a major disaster in their waters. To understand the force of this accident, we must trace other environmental crises the people of Dalian had to endure. On July 16, 2010, China's second largest oil port suffered an accident, creating an explosion so large that it led many residents to believe an earthquake had just occurred. Flames shot hundreds of feet into the air and the harbor that divided the city of Dalian from the adjacent Yellow Sea was rendered invisible by the blaze. The flames and clouds of smoke lasted into the next morning despite 2,000 firefighter's best attempts to douse the orange and yellow plumes. Tanks full of oil had to

be released into the ocean to prevent further explosions.

Fifteen hours after the two pipeline explosions responsible for the blaze occurred, the fire was finally extinguished. Residents, however, were left with another major emergency. The government estimated 420,000 gallons of oil had been dispersed into the bay, where it was suffocating fish, clams, and seaweed (Greenpeace estimates for the oil spill exceed 27 million gallons). Fishermen flooded to the scene, some donning rubber suits and others wearing nothing other than the clothes on their backs and submerged themselves in the oil slick that had grown to cover between 140 and 165 square miles of water and was 20 cm thick in some places. They brought with them empty barrels, straw mats, and any absorbent materials they could find in an effort to sequester the oil that threatened their livelihood, their home, and their lives. This was the worst oil spill in China's history.

Images of the event show fisherman using their helmets to scoop up the sludge floating on the top of their beloved waters. Others hung their bodies over the side of a boat, using what appeared to be large ladles to capture and contain the black oil. The people involved that were jumping to the rescue were variously motivated. According to Wines and Bradsher (2010)

> The Dalian government offered volunteers about $44 for every barrel of recovered oil. The ensuing cleanup frenzy was so intense that the government ran out of barrels, creating a black market that increased the barrel price fivefold. Some four- or five-person boat crews said they raked in as much as $14,000 for a day of work. (para. 20)

The oil was not difficult to capture. It was everywhere.

Despite the 40 oil skimming vessels and 800 additional boats that were working to clean up the spill, the beaches and the water that lapped up on its shores remained layered in the same dark black crude oil, making it difficult to see where one ended and the other

began. Just days after the explosion, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) showed up to help contain the spill by placing protective booms on the beaches. Greenpeace sent in volunteers. People from around the area cut off and donated their hair so it could be used to soak up the oil floating on the surface. In total, between 10,000 and 20,000 fishermen showed up to help using their own bodies and boats. According to Greenpeace (2010) official reports, none of the fishermen they observed wore hazmat suits and many were coated in oil; as a result, dozens of people were taken to the hospital with symptoms of acute chemical exposure.

Nine days after the spill, the *Dalian Daily* reported that the spill had "basically been cleaned" and had not spread to international waters (Chen, 2010, para. 2). Greenpeace disagreed, reporting several days later on July 29, 2010 that the bays remained covered in oil and were unsafe for human use. The remaining oil did not prevent business from resuming. Immediately after the government announced that the port was clean, Dalian reopened Port No. 1 and began receiving tankers. As the second largest oil port in China, businesses and the government alike could not afford to completely halt commerce for long without suffering economic losses. Fisherman, too, prematurely resumed operations, but reported that they were still encountering oil two miles off the coast. According to Chinese newspapers, experts agreed that it would take about 10 years for the marine life affected by the spill to recover (Chang & Zhang, 2010).

Developing a Green Reputation

This oil spill was devastating for the people of Dalian, who prided themselves on being a model "green city," a position they had worked hard to acquire, but which was

slipping from their grasp. Dalian's identity as an environmentally conscious city impacted the movement of information and outrage over networks. It would influence the coalescing of anger, which helped to forge new pathways between people. From the early 1900s through the Maoist era, Dalian was a city known for its industry, including "oil refining, chemical production, and ship building enterprises—and for pollution" (Hoffman, 2009, p. 108). In 1984, Dalian (like Xiamen) was designated a Special Economic Zone in an effort "to attract foreign investment and companies to the area" (Zhang, Kotze, & Yu, 2012, p. 96). As a port city not too far away from Japan and South Korea, it was seen as being an ideal location for international trade. After Bo Xilai took office as mayor of Dalian in 1993, Dalian began changing its image to move away from its reputation as a polluted industrial city. Bo enticed international business to Dalian by turning it from a gray metropolis to a green city. He created parks, moved industry out of the downtown areas, and held polluting businesses accountable by either forcing them to adopt greener practices or shutting them down.

Regional, national, and international bodies took notice. Just 5 years after Bo took office, in 1998, Dalian was designated a National Model City for environmental protection and, that same year, was named China's Top Tourism City. A year later, in 1999, the United Nations (UN) deemed Dalian the Asia-Pacific Region's Leading Urban Governance Model City and the UN awarded Bo the UN-Habitat Scroll of Honour Award. In 2000, the National Advanced Forum for Real Estate named Dalian one of the Ten Best Habitable Cities in China. The praise kept coming, and with it, global enterprises were drawn to do business in Dalian—a city with international renown (Hoffman, 2009). In 2001, Dalian initiated 84 environmental protection projects and was

recognized for its environmental protection efforts as the recipient of both the UN Environmental Program's "Global 500 Award" and the UN's Human Habitat Award, which was largely a result of the infrastructure Bo Xilai had built (Economy, 2010; National Research Council, 2008). In 2003, the city and its mayor both won awards, with Dalian as the recipient of the China Habitat Environment Prize and Bo Xilai the recipient of the China Environment Prize (National Research Council et al., 2008).

Dalian's numerous awards had important economic impacts on the city. In addition to creating more jobs via environmental agencies, the value of buildings in Dalian rose significantly with each new award. The city was designed in such a way that the majority of buildings were within close proximity to green spaces. The city's efforts to create green spaces with their urban planning initiatives were apparent in the layout of the city, which had moved factories to the outskirts, set aside a large tract of land for recreational activities along the bay, and managed its growth so as to make it more sustainable while still prospering. In 2012, a survey conducted in Dalian reported that over 75% of the respondents lived in close proximity to open spaces (Zhang et al., 2012). Dalian's high profile as an environmentally friendly city also drew business from near and afar. In 2001, Dalian was already home to 1,767 foreign invested enterprises.

Of course, many factors were at play in Dalian's transformation to a green city. The decentralization of power in the 1980s offered local leaders more control over their jurisdictions, but also held them responsible for meeting certain economic and environmental targets, thereby encouraging a prioritization of the environment (though many cities did not comply). When Bo Xilai took office in 1993, he was taking over in a city with an open local economy, or one that was friendly to foreign investments.

According to Shin (2004), "Dalian's high degree of economic openness provided local leaders with material basis (capital and technologies) for better environmental policy," which converged with Bo Xilai's "particularly strong commitment to the environment" thereby accelerating

> the effective utilization of the foreign resources for environmental protection, which might explain the city's extraordinary environmental performance compared with other Chinese cities whose degree of economic openness is similar to that of Dalian. (p. 278)

Bo, indeed, left a legacy in Dalian.

Bo Xilai's Legacy

On the way back to my hotel from a meeting, I ended up in a taxi with a driver who, seeing I was a foreigner, took it upon himself to offer me a tour of Dalian. As he drove me around the city, we took one of the large roundabouts in Dalian that bordered an oceanside park. It was easy to tell where the park ended, as the area was rimmed with a series of incredibly tall high rises that circumscribed its border. My friendly guide pointed the buildings out to me, telling me that when Bo Xilai was mayor, these buildings were not there. He was upset by the fact that they had been built because, in his opinion, they ruined the view. Dalian *used to be* 70% green, he told me, but now there were buildings everywhere. When Bo was mayor, he went on to say, the focus was on the natural beauty of the park, but now the new leaders have allowed businesses to build in areas once set aside as green spaces. As we continued on, he showed me the different parks, city squares, and architecture for which Dalian was famous. Before he finally dropped me off at my destination, I told him that he was a wonderful tour guide and thanked him for showing me the city. He replied by telling me that, when Bo was mayor,

Bo told the taxi drivers of Dalian that they should all be ambassadors for Dalian and show visitors the beauty of the city, a duty he still took to heart despite what he felt was a disappointing change in regime—a change that had brought multiple major disasters and a deep sense of disappointment. This would not be the last time I encountered disappointment in Dalian.

Bo's environmental campaign was part of his legacy in Dalian. Though, certainly, many factors had to coalesce in order to create the changes that occurred, Bo was the spokesperson for environmental change and people credited him with the improvements to the city itself, its economy, and its image. According to one report,

> Even people too young to remember Bo's tenure seem to know about his environmental policies. "I was really young when he was in office," a shop assistant in a Dalian shopping center told [Martin], "but everyone says he was really good, particularly at protecting the environment." (Martin, 2012, para. 7)

The people of Dalian embraced the redefinition of their city and its transition from a polluted industrial metropolis to a seaside tourist destination. Dalian's new identity as a "green" city was one people took seriously and wanted to protect. According to Economy (2010), the people participated because as people's incomes went up, so too did their level of environmental awareness; higher salaries correlate with higher environmental awareness, and in Dalian, people became involved. According to Economy (2010) "40 percent of the almost two thousand cases investigated by the [Environmental Protection Bureau] EPB stemmed from citizen complaints" (p. 123). Residents were invested in Bo's vision and complained when they saw violations.

Unlike many other mayors, Bo was not afraid to confront businesses about environmental violations. Rather than privilege business over the environment, Bo encouraged sustainable growth that adhered more strongly to the central government's

environmental policies. For example, in 1996, Dalian rejected 14 projects due to "potential pollution impacts and 206 factories were fined for failing to follow *santongshi,*" a Chinese policy put in place to "ensure that environmental regulations are addressed at the planning, construction, and operation stages of project development" (National Research Council et al., 2008, p. 314). As part of a joint Japan-China pollution prevention program, Dalian received $100 million USD to finance 13 cleaner production and technological transformation projects. As a result of these initiatives, annual emissions were reduced by 20,000 tons of SO2, 20,000 tons of fly ash, and 1,000 tons of NOx. Additionally, several factories lacking pollution control devices were shut down, including four lime factories, 11 charcoal factories, and 150 small scale charcoal ovens (National Research Council et al., 2008, pp. 313-314).

The laws in Dalian also called for responsibility at the individual level for car drivers by implementing an annual motor vehicle emissions inspection program, requiring gas stations to carry higher quality and lower polluting gasoline, and fining those who were noncompliant. Dalian encouraged residents to use public transit, which was convenient and affordable. As the number of cars rose in China, public transit users declined in Dalian, but not at the rapid rate witnessed in other cities. As of 2008, "approximately half of Dalian's residents [3 million people] utilize[d] public transportation for trips in the city" (National Research Council et al., 2008, p. 315).

Greening Dalian was a community mission. With the support of the people, between 2001 and 2005, Dalian "invested 12.9 billion RMB, or nearly 2.1 percent of GDP, into environmental protection" (National Research Council et al., 2008, p. 313). The investment paid off. In 2005, Dalian's air quality ranked 16th nationally, according to the

annual Air Pollution Index (API) rating and "there were 441 registered industries reporting environmental statistics in Dalian" (National Research Council et al., 2008, p. 308). Environmental consciousness and action was widespread. As a result of the attention to natural surroundings, green space, the existence of pollution, and the concerted effort taken to rid Dalian of said pollution, people were more environmentally aware and active. Thus, the events that would befall Dalian need to be understood as occurring in a city acutely aware of the importance of environmental protection. The environmental network had established important relationships between the people and their land, air, and water.

Bo's decision to invest in the environment even if it meant slower economic growth sits in direct contrast to the actions of numerous other cities that welcomed polluting businesses with open arms, regardless of their potential negative impact on the environment. These cities (including Xiamen in 2007) were quick to turn a blind eye to environmental violations, but Bo was shutting down factories and fining those that did not meet environmental standards. In so doing, Bo was forging a model of growth that was unique. He took this model to Chongqing when he was promoted to mayor of the city. His way of conducting affairs and managing the people and businesses came to be known as the "Chongqing Model." The main goal of this model was "to revitalize socialist ideals and populist claims," and sat in direct contrast to the "Guangdong Model," which was characterized by "a more free market approach, rising inequality, and an export orientation" that was far less friendly to environmentally sustainable practices (Zhao, 2012, p. 1). Bo not only followed the rules set forth by the central government, but he was proactive in acquiring funds to support environmental initiatives. He met the goals

outlined by the central government by forcing businesses to comply with regulations rather than overlooking them. According to Shin (2004), "There is no doubt that Bo Xilai's personal commitment to the environment and his political power to achieve policy goals played a significant role in Dalian's environmental protection process" (p. 278).

This legacy lasted after Bo left, though it began deteriorating, in part, because his successor, "Xia Deren, decided to turn the tourist haven into northern China's petrochemical capital" (East by Southeast, 2013, para. 7) despite his original pledge to "take up the national call for 'raising consciousness of ecological safety' (*tigao shengtai anquan yishi*) and building an 'environmentally friendly society'" (Hoffman, 2009, p. 60). Between 2008 and 2013, "the city...dealt with huge oil leaks, massive industrial explosions, and all seafood [that came] out of its surrounding waters [was] polluted" (East by Southeast, 2013, para. 7). Xia Deren, who earned a PhD in finance and taught at the Northeast University of Finance and Economics in Dalian before entering politics as Vice Mayor of Dalian, quickly developed an image problem by prioritizing the oil industry over the environment. According to Larson (2011), Xia "was widely despised in Dalian as corrupt and inattentive to popular will—in marked contrast with his predecessor, the charismatic and beloved Bo Xilai, who had effectively positioned himself as the people's champion" (para. 10).

Despite local admiration for Bo Xilai, his work was sullied as a result of the scandal that indicted him on charges of corruption. After the case was brought against him and he was arrested, Bo and what came to be known as the "Chongqing Model" came under attack, and

> liberal intellectuals and market-oriented media outlets expressed considerable hostility toward Bo and the Chongqing experiments.... They viewed them at best as

> Bo's hypocritical scheme to use Chongqing as a launching pad for his bid for national power. (Zhao, 2012, para. 28)

Zhao (2012) goes on to explain further that "Bo posed a challenge to the ideological legitimacy of the CCP central leadership and its succession plan" (para. 26). Furthermore, his model threatened the type of capitalism that China was embracing and which many high-level officials supported. This, Zhao alleges, is why he was removed from power on corruption charges in 2012, which cast a different light on his past successes.

Bo moved from being a beloved official to a criminal whose wife was convicted of poisoning a UK businessperson. The scandal was widely publicized and discussed across China, making headlines and flooding networks. The reaction was so intense that the government was concerned problems might ensue. Bo Zhiyue, a senior research fellow at the National University of Singapore's East Asian Institute, was quoted as saying, "If they can somehow find evidence against Bo Xilai and have him dealt with before the 18th party congress, his supporters will be silenced" (Bloomberg News, 2012, para. 4). As a result, leaders in Dalian had reason to shift away from the legacy he had left, away from the Chongqing Model, and towards the Guangdong Model of unbridled development.

Zhao (2012) ends her essay on Bo Xilai and the Chongqing Model by leaving readers with this question: "Will the removal of Bo as a contender for national power and the concomitant suppression of leftist communication make China safe at last for the kind of 'political reform' that will secure China as a haven for global capitalism?" (para. 32). Bo left Dalian in 2000, and one can witness marked changes in the years following along with the slippage of environmental protection. In 2011, Dalian was still ranked sixth in China's top 10 cities in sustainability, but it had gradually been falling behind according

to The China Urban Sustainability Index of 2013 (Li, Li, Woetzel, Zhang, & Zhang, 2014). Changes were also occurring in regard to the physical landscape. As the cab driver with whom I spoke lamented, in the years after Bo left, large buildings also went up in what used to be precious green spaces. As I walked along the path by the shore during my visit, I witnessed several new massive hotels being built that were encroaching upon the park area. The air quality was consistently above recommended levels each day I was in Dalian in December of 2014, registering between 150 and 250 PM 2.5 (a rating of "Unhealthy" to "Very Unhealthy"). In 2013, Greenpeace ranked Dalian as having the 57th worst air quality in China (Tan, 2014).

Waning Environmental Policies and Waxing Pollution

The people of Dalian were watching what they had built and worked for—a healthy environment—slipping away from them. As a result, their relationship with their government was changing, which meant that networks were shifting in ways that positioned many people in opposition to their local officials. First, environmental laws were beginning to be circumvented to benefit big business. For example, the Fujia Dahua Petrochemical Company that people protested against in 2011 (the largest PX plant in China at the time) opened in 2007 and began full-scale production in 2009, though they did not receive mandatory environmental approval from the EPB until 10 months after they opened. Furthermore, the factory was located a mere 20 kilometers away from the city center, which falls short of government standards. While "These serious breaches of process should themselves have led to severe sanctions,...thanks to local government support, the project quietly went ahead, out of public sight" (Hao, 2011, para. 4). When

people found out about the plant as a result of the damage it endured in 2011 when typhoon Muifa hit, it created a public storm that serves as evidence of what McGee terms an important indicator of social change—shifting "human consciousness."

The people of Dalian also had to endure the oil spill of 2010, which would leave their beaches damaged for a decade by expert estimates. The government's response to the crisis was questionable. As was made evident in the Greenpeace reports, the local government likely grossly underreported the amount of oil that was released into the port (by 60 times). Nine days after the spill, local officials announced the oil had largely been cleaned up and contained despite reports of large slicks floating in the sea two miles away. Fishermen were allowed to continue their work though a massive burst of chemicals and pollutants had been released into the area. Beaches were opened up for public use even though traces of oil could be found on the sand and rocks as well as in the water that lapped up on the shores, ostensibly because they did not want to lose local revenue from tourism. The government was clearly privileging revenue over safety, and the people of Dalian were attuned to these changes.

The central government was also losing the people's trust over corruption issues, which were garnering a great deal of publicity and altered relationships between the people and their officials. On July 23, 2011, just weeks before the Dalian protests, two high-speed trains collided in Wenzhou killing over 40 and injuring over 200 people. Reports and images of the event were transmitted via the wild public networks that linked the 235 million people using social networks in 2011. Social media trumped mass media coverage. Weibo became the most used platform to discuss and share information about the accident, and it was on Weibo that people discovered that local officials literally tried

to cover up the crash by burying the train and barring reporters from accessing the site (Bondes & Schucher, 2014). The damage, however, had already been done. Average citizens had already documented and disseminated information about the event using smartphones and social media and, in just over a week, 10 million people were talking about the incident and expressing their outrage (Bondes & Schucher, 2014). Many of the people discussing the issue blamed corruption for the incident, which the central government investigated. In the end, the Minister of Railways, Liu Zhijun, was fired and charged with corruption. The people's suspicions were corroborated by official action and trust in officials plummeted.

Two weeks later, on August 8, 2011, Dalian was hit by typhoon Muifa. Torrential rains pounded the city and thousands of people were forced to evacuate as 60-foot-tall waves hit the coast, breaching protective dykes around the PX plant. The Fujia chemical plant and the chemical storage tanks it housed, which were located on the coast just northeast of Dalian, were threatened by the walls of waves. According to reports, a CCTV team was flown in before the storm hit to cover the potential damage the typhoon could inflict on the plant, which drew attention to the imminent dangers. After the reporters were denied access to the plant (and reportedly beaten by plant workers), CCTV pulled the story, which "further frightened an already-alarmed populace and reinforced the belief that company and government financial interests would supersede any health risks" (Gunter, Jr. 2015, p. 150). Those who lived near the Fujia Dahua plant witnessed the breach and the one thousand Chinese military personnel dispatched to conduct emergency repairs (Watts, 2011b). Four hundred trucks were deployed to carry about 20,000 tons of rock and concrete slabs to repair the breaches (China Daily, 2011).

Residents in nearby areas were evacuated from their homes. *People's Daily* reported on the event, stating that "If the breach cannot be blocked up, toxic chemical products may spill, and that would be extremely dangerous" (quoted in Watts, 2011b, para. 5). Authorities repeatedly assured people that the situation was under control. However, the lack of specifics given cultivated the spread of (mis)information and speculation online.

As conversations proliferated on the wild public networks of Weibo, QQ, Renren, and BBS, rumors and fear began spreading like wildfire. As Harold and DeLuca (2005) argue, rumor and speculation have important rhetorical force in times of crisis. People were concerned that damages to the Fujia Dahua chemical plant could cause the same kind of devastation and health risks that the oil spill a mere year prior caused while others feared it would have impacts akin to the ones caused by the recent Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster that happened in Japan. Interviewees made reference to the oil spill and stated they were afraid a PX spill could have similar impacts. The people of Dalian were still recovering from the oil coated beaches and polluted waters that drew international attention in 2010. Dalian was only 1 year into the 10-year recovery period from the spill when typhoon Muifa hit its shores.

Those who had read about the Fukushima nuclear plant disaster were concerned that they would suffer the same types of losses that the areas surrounding the plant did 4 months prior in Japan. The networks of environmental concern vibrated in relationship to what had occurred to Dalian's Japanese neighbors. A magnitude 9.0 earthquake and the resulting 15-meter tsunami created a power outage at the Fukushima nuclear power plant on March 11, 2011. The government evacuated 150,000 residents within 20km of the area over the course of the next few days. On Monday, March 14, the problem was still

ongoing and an explosion created further damage to one of the reactors and sent radioactive debris flying. The following day, there was another explosion that further damaged one of the reactors. An unknown amount of radioactive debris was released into the air and water (World Nuclear Association, 2015). A year after the meltdown, contamination was shown to have substantially decreased, but was far from gone (World Nuclear Association, 2015). Four years after the event, many residents had yet to be able to return to their homes and reports of cancer proliferated. Professor Toshihide Tsuda of Okayama University conducted a study finding that children living in the Fukushima area at the time of the incident were between 20 and 50 times more likely to develop thyroid cancer than children in other areas of Japan (McCurry, 2015). The Japanese people have been dealing with the impacts of this disaster for years and will continue to do so. The cleanup will take approximately 40 years (McCurry, 2015).

Thus, the people of Dalian who saw typhoon Muifa breach the dykes next to the Fujia Dahua plant, watched people being evacuated, and witnessed emergency crews' efforts to contain the damage, saw striking parallels between what happened in Japan and what was happening with them. According to a local NGO representative, when the aforementioned reporters were blocked from getting near the PX plant, word of the breach was further disseminated. Once again, access to information was obstructed in official outlets and, as a result, people became all the more curious and concerned, turning to wild public networks. This event, in which reporters were barred from the plant ostensibly to prevent them from covering the story, had the opposite of its intended effect. The story exploded online and people began discussing, researching, and sharing information and links about PX. This is how they came to find out about the plant's

violation of environmental laws. They feared the worst and the government's increasing lack of transparency as well as its valuing of industry and GDP over the environment did not set minds at ease. People feared that their only child may become the victim of pollution.

A Culminating Storm

Citizens, lacking faith in their government, turned to the Internet to gather information, where they began navigating wild public networks that led to accounts of the protests in Xiamen, fear-induced conversations about Fukushima, and the exaggerated reports by Dr. Zhao Yufen described in the previous chapter. They learned that PX was a dangerous chemical and they learned that protests had been an effective way to protect the local environment in Xiamen. People traded links to stories and summarized their findings for others, which they shared in friend groups. Social media was abuzz with chatter, and anger at officials drove much of the conversation. On screens and streets "wildness in the form of transgressions, shifting networks, speeds, and disruptive creativities" characterized the flows of communication (DeLuca & Brunner, forthcoming).

One post on Weibo read: "the power of the 1,000 missiles aimed at Taiwan is far less than that of the [anticipated] PX explosion" (anonymous, 2011). The comparison of PX to an atomic bomb was appropriated from communications during the Xiamen protests and repeated again and again in various iterations. The same horrific impacts were used to drum up dissent, including the false accusation that the PX would cause leukemia and birth defects, which spread like wildfire across wild public networks. One post that still

remains on Weibo, QQ, and BBSs warned Dalian citizens that the PX plant was transferred to their home after the Xiamen people protested against it, even though the Xiamen plant was transferred to Zhangzhou. One interviewee also repeated this false rumor during the interviews. This warning told readers that the location of the plant northeast of Dalian would cause the winds that blow toward the city center to carry with them "highly toxic material and means that an atomic bomb will settle in Dalian." As a result, "Many people will suffer leukemia and more babies will be born with congenital defects... A paraxylene project should be at least 100 kilometers from a major urban settlement." These last two sentences are taken directly from the text message that circulated around Xiamen, which were taken from an interview with Dr. Zhao Yufen. It ends by repeating the same rumors and the same exaggerated claims before, as the text in Xiamen did, asking residents to forward it to others. It raced across the wild public networks that had been extended through social media. These rumors were charged with an affective force that moved more enraged bodies into the public spaces.

Another piece of information from the Xiamen protests that was spread around Dalian was the story in *Southern Weekly* that proclaimed the people of Xiamen collectively as person of the year. This award justified Dalian's outrage and protests. Blogs and social media feeds were overwhelmed with stories and rumors, which depicted PX as "highly toxic" and as leading to birth defects or miscarriages. Even local news outlets were guilty of exaggerations, making claims that the whole city of Dalian and anything within a 50 kilometer radius would be instantly leveled should the plant explode. Such an eruption would be the biggest PX explosion in the world.

Coalescing Forces

As fear and rumors spread, plans for a protest began coalescing over the very same networks. This was evident in the interviews. One interviewee heard about the protests on Baidu's *tieba,* and another through a colleague, which prompted them to investigate further online. Another participant found out about the protests online and also heard about them from a friend. One interviewee, who works with NGOs across China, compared the firestorm of information and rumors in Dalian to the text message disseminated during the Xiamen protests (Dalian interviewee 4, personal communication, 2014). Rumors fueled the fire. The information about the protests was easy to access, and as the protests drew nearer, the government posted a warning that appeared across from the Baidu *tieba* used to organize the event that told users not to participate in the protests. As was the case in Xiamen, teachers and government officers received a message from local authorities telling them not to join. This did not, however, suppress the turnout. The people, disillusioned by their government's repeated privileging of industry over citizens, were willing to risk freedoms for a safer living environment.

According to interviewees and social media feeds, the protests started off peacefully. Citizens gathered in People's Square in front of the government buildings with homemade signs and banners that read "I love Dalian and reject poison," "Refuse PX," "Today, we ask that the country unite for the people of Dalian," and "Give me back my home and garden! PX out! Protect Dalian!" They sang the national anthem in tshirts that compared PX to a bomb, making their opposition visible and their love for their country audible. Some people donned gas masks and air masks while others shouted "My Dalian!" and asked officials to "Serve the people!". From the start, there was a heavy

police presence, as the officials were well aware of the organizing that was occurring on QQ, Weibo, and BBSs. As the hours wore on, the crowd grew so large that it overflowed from the square into the streets.

The people who marched through the streets were largely white collar workers and were careful not to litter, trample the lawn, or make a mess (see Figure 4). Some protestors brought their children and pets. As the people who gathered stood in the square, protestors repeatedly reminded one another to not act out or become too radical (Hao, 2011). The people were proud of their efforts. One tweet proclaimed that "The Dalian protests will become a model for citizen movements in Northern China" (Tian Ma, personal communication, August, 13, 2011). This level of participation from white collar workers was remarkable, as they have largely been considered to be "apolitical actors," but this crisis was able to bring "first-time demonstrators into the political arena" (Gunter Jr., 2015, p. 153).

Figure 4. Protestors gathering in People's Square by the thousands and avoiding the grass (@cctvWeb, August 13, 2011).

Most people wielded nothing but smartphones, which they used to capture images and video of the event. Aware that censorship would likely descend upon the people livetweeting the protests, one user recommended that independent reporters turn to Weibo "quickly" to view the images and text (@Hualonglee, August, 13, 2011). Another encouraged people to post and check quickly (@wenyuchao, August 13, 2011). Still others posted links to social media outside the Great Firewall on which people could view a collection of photos from the protests, like Twitter. At one point, one of the users helping to curate the image gallery, @wenyuchao, asked other people to help upload photos to the collection because his Internet connection was slow (August, 13, 2011). This post was picked up and retweeted by numerous others, who were able to save images before they were deleted. Wild public networks helped to save this important information and documentation of the event.

When Baidu, the country's largest search engine, began deleting information related to the protests (likely in response to official orders), it was immediately tweeted to fellow social media users. Weibo was the next platform to shut down, deleting references to "Dalian." Users quickly adapted by adding a space between the two characters that compose Dalian (大 and 连), which evaded the auto censoring and shared this trick with friends and followers. According to *China Digital Times,* the words *take a walk, Dalian, Fujia,* and *PX* were all censored on Weibo.

Woven throughout this stream of posts were proliferations of accusations that PX was a highly toxic chemical. Lian Yue, the blogger from Xiamen, posted in solidarity with the people of Dalian. Images, posts, and retweets forged new paths the further extended the wild public networks. Eventually, the local officials disrupted mobile service in a last

ditch effort to prevent the protests from getting bigger and garnering publicity. The *force majeure* was building.

As the crowd tried to march through the streets, they were met with a wall of armed police. Unable to move forward, the protestors sat down on the pavement. Images on Weibo show hundreds of people calmly and peacefully sitting on the sidewalks that crisscross People's Square. Following the social media feeds, it is apparent that tensions were mounting between people and the police, who were confiscating banners and blocking access routes in an attempt to control the situation. This *force majeure,* however, was beyond their control. Tensions were only exacerbated by the fact that outside police were brought in to deal with the situation. These outside armed guards were not necessarily sympathetic to the plight of the local people and were more likely to use unnecessary force.

It is unclear what started the violence. Images of protestors throwing water bottles at armed police speckled the feeds. The police charged the crowd. According to one interviewee who was onsite, the people in the front rows received the brunt of the offensive and were hit with billy clubs, which resulted in "a lot of serious injuries" (Dalian interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015). Behind the first line of police were more police and the people were advised to quickly leave the square, but many stayed into the evening darkness.

Though numerous reports do not discuss the violence, interviewees reported that many people were arrested during the protests. One participant was included in a group of people who were put in prison, and another interviewee was beaten. The scene after the police charged the crowds was rather messy. Cellphones were strewn across the

ground, dropped in a mad dash to evade the nightsticks being swung at heads. Others were holding their smartphones in their hands and capturing images of the violence, which they quickly uploaded for others to download before the evidence was deleted. On social media streams, one user commented that censors would be working overtime to delete all the images. A participant who was jailed for a night stated that the police took his phone and looked through the photos (Dalian interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). They did not, however, delete them perhaps, he said, because the Dalian police are also citizens, also victims of the pollution. The police officers did ask him for his QQ, Weibo, and Renren account information. After this, he anticipated being monitored and he acted as if he was being watched.

Another protestor said he was able to run fast enough to evade the police but his friend was not so lucky and was beaten. He had to be taken to the hospital where he had multiple stitches. These images of the violence and battered bodies also made their way onto social media and were saved by those quick enough to capture them moving on wild public networks before they were censored. Images as such posed both opportunities and problems for protestors. On the one hand, they could not be automatically deleted in the same way words could. Images transmit information differently than text, thereby making them much more difficult to block using automatic censoring software. However, the vast amounts of images and footage uploaded online also acted as a repository of visual evidence the police could access that showed who was participating. According to one interviewee, the police reviewed this footage and used it to arrest the people involved in the protests by asking people they identified to turn themselves in to the police (Dalian interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015).

After the peaceful gathering turned into a violent free for all, the authorities announced they would shut down and move the plant. Dalian's party chief, Tang Jun, stood atop a police van with a megaphone to announce the plant would be relocated. His announcement was met with skepticism from the chanting crowds who asked for the terms of the move. Others quickly uploaded the video of Tang with text urging people to watch it before it was deleted (@fluteking5, August 13, 2011). The people refused to disperse until they were given a timetable for the shutdown and relocation. Hours later, officials announced again that they would close the factory. Word of this decision spread rapidly and was even covered on CCTV, the state-run news agency. Screens and streets wildly overlapped and became intimately tangled.

This decision, like the protests, did not follow the laws in place or "properly attribute responsibility.... As with the original decision to build the plant, the local government's resolution to move it was not the result of due legal and administrative procedures" (Hao, 2011, para. 6). Rather, it was a rash response to an uprising and, as a result, there were no measures put in place to hold the government to its promise. Ultimately, the government defaulted on its agreement. A source that had direct knowledge of the plan's operation corroborated the testimony by one of the people with whom I spoke; the source told Reuters that the plant was operating as normal and had not made any changes days after the protests (Chen, 2011). Though the protests were an instrumental failure, they still created a *force majeure* in that they created a massive disruption that forged new pathways by which people communicated with their government. People were not calling the city environmental hotline to report this issue. Their human consciousness had shifted. This failure made evident problems in current relationships by highlighting the

need for transparency between citizens and their government, the lack of public trust in officials, and the level of investment people had in their living environment. In moving the PX opposition outside the systems in place designed to tame dissent, it permanently disrupted them and made clear that crises create new grounds for negotiation.

Motivating Movement

As was the case with Xiamen, motivations for joining in the protests were varied, which helps to advance my argument for attention to polysensus within what appear to be unified protests. Much of the support was rooted in Dalian's identity as a green city and people's allegiance to cultivating a green environment. In short, many people in Dalian had a high level of environmental awareness that had been fostered through a particular relationship with their government via almost a decade of reforms, city planning, and policymaking. This is evident in some of the responses. When asked why they joined in the protests, participants replied that Dalian was their city and they did not want anything bad to happen to it (Dalian interviewees 1 & 2, personal communication, 2015). They felt responsible for their city and wanted to support efforts to protect it. One participant said, "It's very simple, to open this kind of chemical plant in a densely populated area is unsafe" (Dalian interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015). The plant put their beloved town in danger. These sentiments were echoed on Weibo, some of which were reposted on Twitter, including @fluteking5 who posted "I love Dalian and reject poison" (August 13, 2011) and @kansir, who wrote "For China and for the next generation, we work together" (August 14, 2011). This plant threatened to further disrupt their waning status as an environmentally safe city, which in turn threatened their relationship with

their home. Their action through protest discloses information about the nature of their relationship and of changing consciousness (Bateson, 2000).

Another major thread was woven through the protestors' testimony—a lack of trust in their government. In the wake of the accidents Dalian had suffered and the subsequent lack of transparency from government officials, most were reticent to believe much that came out of officials' mouths. In addition to underreporting the amount of oil leaked by the 2010 explosions, the government also failed to report that there was a massive oil leak into the Bohai Sea near Dalian in 2011. Seventeen days after it began, the news did become public, but it was the result of a microblog post, not an official statement (Watts, 2011a). When the PX plant was allegedly damaged during the typhoon, few believed the government's official statement regarding the plant. Though the government evacuated people from surrounding areas, officials maintained that no leaks had occurred. People, however, were certain that they had. The waning trust in officials was apparent in protestor's comments. One protestor told reporters, "Even if there was contamination, the government would restrict the news," (quoted in Watts, 2011c, para. 11). People were aware that government officials were not transparent about environmental issues and potential threats to the health of the population. One person told reporters that he protested because the people of Dalian "know that the typhoon caused some leak of poisonous chemicals from the PX project and we are all worrying about it because it is a threat to our life" (quoted in "China protest closes toxic," 2016, para. 15). Unfortunately, they could not even trust the government to protect their health. The relationship between many people and their government had been permanently altered due to their changing awareness about these issues.

The disillusionment of the Dalian people was evident in the protestor's behavior as well as the images and words that were coalescing into a massive torrent of information about the protests mobilized over wild public networks of screens and streets. At one point during the protests, a group of people collectively gave the middle finger to the government offices. People on social media reported it to those watching. A Twitter user who was crossposting from Weibo proclaimed that "the People's Congress system is shit" (@bornanit, August, 13, 2011). Still others compared the Dalian issue to other corruption cases, including the Wenzhou train. One user linked Wenzhou to the Dalian protests using the hashtag #DalianPX (#大连PX) (@TinylightWong, August, 13, 2011). Another by the username @WSHNHONG commented that though the officials announced the PX plant would be moved, the "government's trustworthiness" was nonexistent, which will provoke speculation (August 14, 2011). As the protests continued, the posts questioning authorities mounted. "If the government thinks PX is safe," posted @tatamama, "then they should build the government offices next to the plant" (August 14, 2011). Others went even further, posting "Every time we stand up, they will be forced to weigh the cost of evil" (@Jwong1202, August, 13, 2011).

A third theme that arose that drove people to action was the success of past protests. As was discussed previously in this chapter, when residents discovered that the typhoon could damage the Fujia Dahua PX plant and cause a spill, they went online to find out more. They found the government propaganda proclaiming PX to be safe, but they also found information about the protests that occurred in Xiamen and saw that the people were successful. This transmitted not only inspiration, but also the implicit message that PX must be truly harmful if the government was willing to submit to the people. It

bolstered the exaggerated claims made by Dr. Zhao Yufen and the text message that appeared on one million cell phones. It also directed people to Lian Yue's blog where he told the people of Xiamen that they would be considered dimwitted if they failed to protest against the plant. People saw pictures of the march and the banners people carried.

In talking with protestors and looking through social media feeds, many references to Xiamen existed online. One social media user called the protests in Dalian part of a new wave of social unrest that began in Xiamen (@mninuof, August, 13, 2011). Another wrote, "from Xiamen to Dalian, citizen awareness is worthy of celebration" (@fredericshen, August 14, 2011). People retweeted Lian Yue's post during the protests and linked to *Xinhua* and *Reuters* news stories that compared Dalian to Xiamen (@abc226, August, 13, 2011). "The south has Xiamen, the north has Dalian," wrote @Yisuca, thereby comparing and linking the two "successes" (August 13, 2011). The momentum of the Xiamen protests and the affective arguments served as a force that helped people redefine their citizenship.

Distancing Differences

Though similarities existed between the 2007 Xiamen protests and the 2011 Dalian protests, major differences were also apparent. One user expressed disappointment that Dalian's protests were not as peaceful as Xiamen's (@bleutee, August, 15, 2011). However, the circumstances the people in Dalian were facing were quite different. First, an independent businessperson from Taiwan did not own the PX plant in Dalian. Rather, the Dalian Chemical Group (a local government-backed company) and a private real estate company called Fujia Group jointly own the company (Chen, 2011). This

company, as the largest producer of PX in China at the time (manufacturing 700,000 tons of PX per year), was in the top 10 biggest revenue generators for Dalian. Gunter, Jr. (2015) elaborates:

> As is often the case, financial concerns drove the decision to reopen the plant. On the one hand, the local government feared Fujia would sue the city for breach of contract and Dalian would be liable for compensation, as the $1.5 billion plant is owned jointly by the city and Fujia. Additionally, the local government would lose approximately $330 million annually in tax revenue if it moved one of the ten biggest factories in Dalian to outside the city. (p. 152)

This brings forth the second major difference, unlike the case in Xiamen, the Fujia Dahua plant in Dalian was already built and in operation. To follow through with their promise, officials would be creating an economic disaster in Dalian because they had invested so deeply in the plant. They were very aware of this. Yang Guang, an official from the Dalian Propaganda office, was quoted as saying "We need to consider the profit of business. It takes time to move the plant. If the production is halted before the relocation, the business will be bankrupt" (quoted in Gunter, Jr., 2015, p. 152). While the Xianglu Dragon Group in Xiamen also lost money in the move, the losses they suffered were far less significant in comparison.

Third, Dalian is a northern city. As has been gestured to in some of the comments above like "The south has Xiamen, the north has Dalian," many Chinese people find there to be important differences between northern and southern people. Though generalizations are difficult and dangerous to make, they do influence how people view a movement like the one that happened in Dalian. In general, Southerners are considered to be more liberal and more environmentally minded; whereas, Northerners tend to be more conservative and less concerned with environmental protection. Part of the reason for this difference in political leanings is that those areas that lie the furthest away from the

capitol were less strictly governed in China's long history simply due to distance, which to an extent, increased their freedom. Historically speaking, "given the geographical distance, South China developed on its own terms and at its own pace into a diverse, rich, open, and vibrant region" (Siu, 1993, p. 23). At points in China's history, the south had its own currency and trade relations. Siu (1993) elaborates:

> Scholars in Beijing considered themselves legitimate heirs of the May Fourth tradition while those in the South were irrational romantics and ruffians. Many southern scholars, on the other hand, equated the North with enclosure, chaos, and backwardness" (pp. 25-26).

These sides, so to speak, carried with them a certain identity.

In terms of environmentalism, the south is home to many nature reserves, including the first ever established in China, Dinghu Mountain Nature Reserve, which was founded in 1956. Numerous others came after, including Xishuangbanna Nature Reserve (founded in 1958), Fanjing Mountain Nature Reserve, Wolong Nature Reserve (China's largest and most important sanctuary for giant pandas), Shennongjia Nature Reserve, Zhangjiajie Nature Reserve, Lushan Nature Reserve, Poyang Lake Nature Reserve, East Dongting Lake Nature Reserve, and the Chinese Alligator Nature Reserve. While nature reserves do exist in northern China, they tend to be concentrated in Xinjiang in the west and the remote areas near Inner Mongolia. The presence of nature reserves, the development of ecotourism, and the attention and praise they draw from national and international organizations have helped to heighten awareness and place value on nonhuman environments.

Some of this heightened environmental awareness in the South may also be related to particular sets of beliefs. For example, Stimpson (2003) argued that Confucian concepts such as *feng shui,* which "can be described as a popular and utilitarian view of the

Chinese approach to nature" can become "a force for environmental conservation" characterized by attention to relationships between things (p. 56). He goes on to write, "For some Chinese people at least, particularly in Southern China, [these beliefs] are part of their covert belief system and direct how the environment is perceived" (Stimpson, 2003, p. 56).

Thus, attitudes toward the environment, in some ways, have the propensity to stoke environmental activism in the South since the people already possess a certain level of awareness in, reverence for, and value in the surrounding environment, which impacts the movement and reaches of wild public networks. In the North, the lack thereof combined with close proximity to Beijing has made protest less likely. If one considers the location of the larger environmental protests that have occurred in China—Xiamen's 2007 anti-PX protests, Zhangzhou's anti-PX protests in 2008, Quanzhou's 2009 protests against a faulty sewage facility, Dalian's 2011 anti-PX protests, Ningbo's 2012 anti-PX protests, Hainan's 2012 protests against a coal fired power plant, Shifang's 2012 protests against a molybdenum and copper refinery, Qidong's 2012 protests against a wastewater pipeline, Chengdu's 2013 anti-PX protests, Kunming's 2013 anti-PX protests, Hangzhou's 2014 protests against a waster incinerator, Maoming's 2014 anti-PX protests, and Shanghai's 2015 anti-PX protests—one can see that the only protest that took place in the north was the 2011 protests in Dalian. The Dalian people were fighting a difficult battle with Beijing in close proximity.

Beyond these three major differences, the Dalian protestors lacked a well-known scientist like Zhao Yufen, who had ties to the CPPCC, to take the issue to Beijing and publicize them during a joint meeting of the CPPCC and NPC. Nearby Hong Kong news

outlets were not picking up the story and making it public. The people with whom I spoke were well aware of the fact that their battle was significantly different than the one waged by the people of Xiamen. They knew that when the people of Xiamen won, the fact that the plant had not yet been built was crucial, whereas the one in Dalian had been up and running for over 2 years when the protests occurred. They were very aware that moving China's largest PX manufacturer, which also manufactured numerous other chemicals, would be extremely costly, and their government officials were mostly concerned with profit. They knew that Dalian, as a northern city, faced different difficulties. Two of the participants I interviewed together debated whether cities in northern China could successfully protest. Though both the protests in Xiamen and Dalian were *forces majeure,* the forces that coalesced to create the eruptions were distinct, as were the reverberations the ensued in the aftermath over networks.

Stacking Networks in the People's Favor

Other major differences between the 2007 Xiamen protests and the 2011 Dalian protests existed that aided the Dalian protestors. The existence and adoption of an array of social media platforms meant that anger could travel further faster. By 2011, more people were online, more social media platforms had been developed, more people had smartphones, a higher dependence on online networks existed, networks were becoming more complex, and more people were communicating more often. In 2011, China had 485 million Internet users and 235 million social media users, which is 137 million more than the 98.2 million that were using BBSs in 2007 during the Xiamen protests (Wee, 2011b). Furthermore, the number of options open to people to connect had exploded. In

2007, people mostly communicated online using BBSs and the only social media platform available, QQ. At the end of 2007, China Internet Watch (2013) reported that QQ had just broken 100 million users, but by 2011, QQ users had reached 500 million registered users and QZone was China's biggest traffic distribution platform.[i] In late 2011, registered Weibo accounts were upwards of 233 million, and the number of Renren accounts sat at approximately 137 million, meaning that people were using multiple platforms to connect (China, 2011a, 2011b). People were also engaging on BBS including Baidu's *tieba.* In short, in 2011, "microblogs in China [were] mushrooming across the web, including variations from Xinhua, Baidu, Netease, and Shanda's Tuita" (Wee, 2011b, para. 4). The strength of connections across these various platforms, as was previously mentioned, was crucial when censorship practices were used during the protests. Users encourage one another to post on all platforms available and, when possible, to use a Virtual Private Network (VPN) to post on sites like Twitter, which were impervious to Chinese censorship (though the number of people using VPNs was considerably smaller, especially after the government crackdown on VPNs in May of 2011).

In 2011, China became the world's biggest smartphone market and boasted 900 million mobile phone users, the highest number of users in the world (Wee, 2011b). This means that people were connecting over social media platforms using mobile devices, especially in Dalian, a relatively wealthy city where people were more likely to invest in iPhones and Androids. Having smartphones in hand, rather than the more basic models the people of Xiamen used in 2007, meant that images were more easily transmittable and had a major presence across wild public networks. Video footage was also more

easily captured and uploaded. When the protests began, participants could report events in real time rather than having to find a computer, download, and then upload images and video.

Next, people were becoming increasingly intertwined with online networks, which they used to communicate with colleagues, family, and friends. People also began turning to online networks for news because information was provided in real time and the content was not *as* controlled as it was in state sanctioned media. In 2011, according to the Communication University in Beijing's report, "Microblogs like Sina Weibo [were] the third favorite online news source in China.... The research revealed that breaking news such as official corruption and scandals drew a lot of traction on microblogs" the year prior (Wee, 2011a, para. 1). Weibo became the place where networks of corruption were exposed while networks of common people commented, argued, and debated. These wild public networks were home to all kinds of information, rumors, dissent, and ideas, but officials acting inappropriately were a favorite topic among users. The University's report stated that improper behavior or remarks made by government officials account for 70% of trending topics (Wee, 2011a). People in China were increasingly turning to online networks for more reasons, increasing their connection to devices.

As more people joined in on conversations, shared stories and pictures, and commented, they became increasingly drawn into the fold and networks became larger and more complex. People were able to connect to people they would otherwise have never known. Weibo users could follow the feeds of celebrities and bloggers and interact with fans from across the country. This high level of activity kept networks buzzing, changing, expanding, and moving, so that when users wanted to connect over more

political issues, the networks had already existed. Government officials, seeing these networks as a means by which to connect with and monitor public opinion, hopped onboard. In 2011, 630 government departments in China had microblog accounts, which they could use to transmit messages and respond to the people (Wee, 2011a). The people could also interact with these accounts and draw them into conversations. Networks upon networks formed these complex moving labyrinths that wove between and connected people in new and powerful ways that influenced the shape, size, and characteristics of the 2011 protests.

The fact that more people were using networks and that they were becoming increasingly dependent on social media for news and personal communication meant that they were spending more time online. According to a 2010 *McKinsey Quarterly* report, people in China's 60 largest cities spend 70% of their leisure time online and those in smaller villages, 50% (Atsmon & Magni, 2010). Users went online to watch videos, chat, play games, download music (most of it for free), and buy products. The level of connection people had with their devices—whether that be smartphones or personal computers—was increasing rapidly, which ensured that the people posting during the Dalian protests had a large audience following their feeds and watching what unfolded.

This high level of engagement, these vast audiences that were able to connect to one another so quickly, the mobile phones that allowed people to upload documentation of what transpired, the presence of authorities on Weibo, the tangled nature of the platforms being simultaneously operationalized, and the transformation of mobile phones into necessary equipment for daily life—these factors helped to lay the pathways of wild public networks by which a *force majeure* could erupt and upend order, changing

relationships and making possible new ways of being in the world.

From Disappointment to Unexpected Implications

As has been outlined previously in this chapter, the protests in Dalian were ultimately an instrumental failure. The plant continues to operate at the time of this writing (2016). The loss was something I felt during my time in Dalian. I left my first interview feeling deflated after the protestors told me their efforts failed to move the plant. I thought back to the taxi driver who so graciously served as my tour guide and how he cursed the current mayor under his breath. I woke up each morning and looked at the air quality index (AQI) only to find I would need to again don an air mask as the PM 2.5 levels were continually at unhealthy levels. I compared the concrete shores of Dalian to Xiamen's soft sandy beaches and felt a certain edge to the city. I considered my conversations with the Xiamen interviewees who had been part of a successful environmental event and felt sympathy for the people of Dalian who had been lied to by their officials and some of whom had been beaten and jailed.

The Dalian protestors said the event and the violent nature of it damaged their enthusiasm towards the country and city. Their relationships had been altered, and this is where we witness the movement of the social. Whereas they had previously defended their country when it faced harsh criticisms during the Beijing Olympics, they now were disillusioned. As one interviewee put it, "This protest has little effect on the factory, but it has a great effect on society....It impacted people's confidence in their government" (Dalian interviewee 1, personal communication, 2014). Not only were they, themselves, distraught over the outcome, but they were also afraid that the violence and instrumental

failure would create despair for the youth who participated. This younger generation was next in line to protect Dalian, to fight for their home. If this was how the government reacted to protest—a constitutional right—this next generation would likely be more reticent to participate in uprisings. Perhaps, they conjectured, protests were not an effective way to voice their opinions.

The instrumental failure also created an increased lack of trust in the government. The outcome, the protestors said, hurt the mayor's image and caused people to lose confidence in the government. The current mayor, they told me, judges his worthiness on his economic development, not his environmental safety record. This is why the plant was allowed to be built in the first place. The Fuijia PX plant was primarily a revenue generator for the city and helped to supply the country with PX, which is an important ingredient in many manufacturing processes and, in turn, tied to China's export economy. If factories were missing an essential ingredient in the creation of certain fabrics and plastics, they simply could not make the products. Revenues across the country would drop.

The impacts of the protest reverberated beyond it as an instrumental failure. Scholars must consider and trace the unanticipated movement of the social. As Gunter, Jr. (2015) argues,

> To label Dalian a [Not In My Backyard] NIMBY failure, using Western democratization-school standards of civil society activity, is perhaps...a rush to judgment.... Much more interesting than the wins and losses of continuing plant operation is the process by which environmental activists let their displeasure be known—and the process by which governmental actors reacted. Dalian, thus still serves as an example of countervailing political power in China. (p. 152)

If we consider the protests as a *force majeure,* the repercussions of the protests, indeed, extend beyond whether it counts as a win or a loss. Gunter, Jr. (2015) asserts that "Dalian

highlights the degree to which NIMBY events are much more complicated than the black-and-white rhetoric of victory and defeat" (p. 153). I agree and extend Gunter, Jr.'s argument to consider how it moved the social within and outside of the locus of the event.

Within Dalian, the protests reinforced distrust in their officials and spread it to new networks of people, yet another marker of social movement. As will be discussed in the next chapter, distrust in officials is a growing problem in China that is creating a type of social unrest and instigating increasingly more intense and violent protests that extend beyond environmental issues. People are also protesting networks of corruption and the repercussions of the decisions made by crooked officials, including reckless economic development. They are coalescing in numbers previously unimaginable. As GDP continues to trump the health, well-being, personal interests, and financial stability of people in China, more and more citizens are fighting against the systems and networks that ignore the people's interests.

One impact of the protest was that it raised awareness about the issues at hand, which, in turn, increased support for the protestors that extended far from the streets. For example, during the protests, as was the case in Xiamen, those who were not willing to engage in an illegal gathering showed support by buying water and snacks for the people holding signs and chanting. Others showed support in additional ways. For example, one protestor whose friend was injured during the protests was very concerned about taking time off from work to go visit his injured friend, as he was reticent to reveal to his boss why his brother had been injured. Not only did his boss give him leave from work to go see his friend, but he also covered the hospital fees. This sign of tacit support was clearly

meaningful. As unrest grows, networks of support continue to coalesce, which means that the potential for further movement in Dalian exists.

Repercussions pulsated beyond Dalian's jurisdiction as well. While the people of Dalian dealt with the disappointment, the people of Ningbo, Kunming, Maoming, Hangzhou, Qidong, Quanzhou, and other cities saw it as a success. After the 2012 anti-PX protest in Ningbo, the newspaper, *Qilu Wanbao,* reported that "Because of the problem with PX, this same mass incident have [sic] already occurred in Xiamen, Dalian and other cities, and there is no way that Ningbo didn't know about these incidents in other cities" (quoted in van Wyk, 2012, para. 8). Social media and Internet search engines made searching for "PX" easy. The results, inevitably, included information about what happened in Xiamen, and then Dalian. For those who were aware that the plant in Dalian was not shut down, this lesson gave protestors reason to continue to protest even after local officials made promises. Those in Ningbo continued to protest "even after the authorities pledged to halt the PX project, in part because suspicion of the government runs so high. 'We don't trust them at all; we think [their promise] is a stalling tactic,'" said 1 participant (Larson, 2012, para. 6).

In 2013, the people of Kunming staged two separate protests in a single month against a planned PX plant. They, too, went online to find out about PX, but as Li Bo, the head of China's first ENGO, Friends of Nature, put it, the people of Kunming "had a lot of difficulty getting satisfactory information" about PX (quoted in Kaiman, 2013b, para. 18). Li went on to say that "A lot of worries and doubts have accumulated [around PX], which is more or less what happened with the previous PX projects in Dalian and Ningbo" (quoted in Kaiman, 2013b, para. 18). After witnessing the protests in Kunming,

the authorities in Chengdu "appear[ed] nervous that large scale environmental rallies could spread there because of public anger over a PX plant in Pengzhou, on the city's outskirts" (Phillips, 2013, para. 15). And they did. The people in Chengdu also rose up against their government, demanding that "PX get out!"

The protests in Qidong against a wastewater pipeline in 2012 were also inspired by the anti-PX protests in Xiamen and Dalian. Though the people were not protesting against PX, they had been inspired by the successes that preceded them. Willy Wo-Lap Lam, adjunct professor of history at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, reacted to the protests in Qidong by asserting that they "demonstrate that ordinary people's awareness of their rights has increased and they are more willing to assert their rights" (quoted in Zhou & Sanderson, 2013, para. 4). The people were also finding that protest was far more successful in convincing leaders to adhere to environmental laws than public hearings, letter writing, petitions, or calls to a hotline. People were finding that the systems in place were broken. As Lubman (2012) writes,

> in order for public participation to work, both officials and citizens must be educated and trained on its mechanics, such as the conduct of public hearings. This is no easy matter, since local officials often neither seek nor heed public sentiment and the public, in turn, has often grown doubtful about officials' motivation. (para. 8)

This is a problem across China and, until it is addressed, will likely continue to contribute to further clashes and citizen's use of any means necessary to ensure a safe environment for themselves and their children. Protests in China jumped 120% between 2010 and 2011 (Duggan, 2013). Consciousness was changing; the social moved.

As the protests garnered increasing attention locally, nationally, and globally, leaders were forced to address the issues at hand. In July of 2012, then President Hu Jintao, in a speech addressed to CCP leaders and officials, told his audience that "people's demands

for a better life and expectations for prompt solutions to prominent social problems were increasing" (Zhou & Sanderson, 2013, para. 6). Surveys of people's concerns show President Hu was correct. In November 2012, *China Daily* found that environmental degradation ranked fourth on over half of the respondent's list of concerns, only after the wealth gap, corruption, and the power of vested interests ("The East is grey," 2013). This may have been part of the motivation behind the announcement made during the Communist Party conference in 2012, in which central party officials "added the environment to the four 'platforms'—basic beliefs that define what the party stands for" ("The East is grey," 2013, para. 22). Additionally, the government increased its budget for *weiwen,* or "stability maintenance" so much so that it spent more on internal security than defense beginning in 2010 (Blanchard & Ruwitch, 2013). This disparity "shows the party is more concerned about the potential risks of destabilization coming from inside the country than outside, which tells us the party is much less confident," according to Nicholas Bequelin, a researcher at Human Rights Watch (quoted in Blanchard & Ruwitch, 2013, para. 5). The consciousness of the government changed as well.

Each protest, as a *force majeure,* changed relations between the people and their government not only in a particular location, but also across China. Each new protest adds force, creates a precedent for change, and inspires other people to stand up for their rights and ask for increased transparency, a better system of checks and balances, reduced corruption, and a safe living environment, even if it means reduced GDP growth. The problem of transparency, however, persists. People in many places do not trust their government, which means they will believe rumors before they believe propaganda, so they are protesting against PX, but it is far from the most dangerous chemical being

produced. They are, however, justified in doubting that such plants will be properly built and regulated, as was the case in Dalian. Meanwhile, the government is desperately trying to convince people that PX is safe and, in some cases, taking it too far by alleging that PX is no more harmful than a cup of coffee. Such campaigns only exacerbate mistrust and add to the factors coalescing into a *force majeure*.

More dispersed repercussions also splintered out of the Dalian protests as well as the subsequent uprisings in other cities. In 2014, one of my friends in China who was studying for the civil service exam (a test anyone interested in a government job has to take) told me that she had first heard about PX when taking a practice test. In the study guide was a question that asked the respondent to suggest solutions to the problem of people protesting against PX plants in China. The sample answer provided offers Japan's method of dealing with uprisings as a solution. The question specifically mentions PX. This question makes evident that the government was struggling with these uprisings. Dealing with the protests had become and remains an important national issue.

Conclusion

This chapter addresses two issues by focusing on the 2011 protests in Dalian. The first is that to judge a protest on the basis of its instrumental success overlooks the impacts it has on moving the social, which I have outlined above. Instead, I traced changes in relationships and consciousness to document the movement of the social. The second issue I want to bring to the fore here is another change in consciousness—the transformation of civic engagement. As has been established in preceding chapters, the U.S. privileges a very particular form of democracy and a very particular form of citizen

engagement. This chapter helps scholars to elaborate further on the differences between civic engagement in China and the U.S., and in doing so provides a mirror by which we can better see how protest in U.S. culture functions in relationship to the government.

In times of protest in the U.S., the people are often positioned as fighting against their government for the betterment of the people. People do not "partner" with the government during protests. In Dalian (and elsewhere), people are definitely protesting *against*, but they are protesting against a PX factory and corruption. The difference is nuanced, but important. For example, the protestors are saying "PX get out!" in between singing songs of national pride. They are asking their leaders to serve the people while carrying banners crafted in the same style as the ones that pronounce government slogans. Protestors who participated in the Dalian protest also participated in the protests in Japan during the Olympics to help keep the flame lit as it made its way to China, and they did so out of a deep sense of national pride. They saw the anti-PX protests functioning in a similar way. In light of this, "The conventional Western conceptualization of civil society as a countervailing power to government is thus inappropriate" (Gunter, Jr., 2015, p. 144). Citizens are willing to work with the government and "engage in more of a partnership with the government, in which they contribute important resources that the government lacks in order to help solve common public problems" (Gunter, Jr., 2015, p. 144).

This sentiment was reflected in the interviews I conducted with ENGO employees throughout China. Representatives repeatedly told me that the government wanted to partner with these NGOs—whether they were legally registered or not—because they could collect, share, and analyze information that would help improve policymaking and

implementation. As was previously mentioned, in 2015, the central government officially gave NGOs the right to sue polluting industries. The government is recognizing, on some levels, that partnering with NGOs can help them carry out important work.

Civic engagement is changing in China and changing China. People are becoming involved and trying to determine how they can renegotiate relationships with their officials to create more productive exchanges. Regardless of the instrumental success or failure of protests, these events continue to have force. They are moving the social in important ways and more and more people in cities across China are standing up and insisting that the government serves more than the local GDP. Ideally, developing partnerships between the people and the government via NGOs or committees could be a means by which to restructure citizen/government relationships. However, the government has much work yet to do to create the space for productive relations.

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[i] This number—500 million—conflicts with the 235 million total users likely for two reasons. First, users will often register more than one account to a single name, either because they want to use more than one account or because they re-registered with a different username after forgetting an old username of password. Second, social media companies do not often account for this precisely because higher numbers equate to higher investment and profit.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAOMING: NETWORKS OF CORRUPTION AND ACTIVISM

The protests that occurred in Maoming once again drew people fighting for the environment and angered citizens fighting against corruption. As it culminated into a *force majeure,* it entangled people in the violence, as is evidenced by the following account:

> *I wasn't at the protests until 9pm of the second day.... At about 9pm, people started throwing things.... The police started to disperse the crowd. Then a group of people overturned a car. Prior to this, there was no direct conflict with the police or armed guards. But after 9pm, the police started using violence to disperse the crowds. It was then that I saw a child overtaken and hit by the police with a baton. I looked back and he had fainted. I went over to yell at the police and tell them they shouldn't hit a child. They just hit me and took me away.* (Maoming interviewee 2, personal communication, 2014)

This onlooker, who was determined to stay peaceful, was drawn in by the violence, by an affective response to an injured child, by her sense of civic duty. She was swept up by the *force majeure* that was erupting in her town and became part of the violence, which led to her detention by police. The Maoming protests, which coalesced from a dispersed network of actants, erupted with a force that would overwhelm those there with peaceful intentions. In their wake, the people of Maoming, local officials, industry representatives, and mainstream media would be left to deal with broken relationships and a change in the

way citizens interact with their government. In this final chapter, I will trace how social media networks carrying the force of previous anti-PX protests interrupted networks of corruption and forced another renegotiation of relationships. To begin, I will trace the networks of corruption that crisscross through and beyond Maoming. I will then turn to the protests to track how corruption and the backlash to it helped to foment the protests as corruption charges created tremors across social media before turning to the renegotiations and impacts of this *force majeure.*

Historical Reaches

Though Maoming's history dates back 4,500 years, it was not promoted to city status until 1959, approximately 4 years after Sinopec Maoming Petrochemical Company was founded. Maoming proved to be an ideal site for oil extraction, as it sat on a large tract of oil shale. In the 1950s, a mining area was constructed to extract the black gold from a 50 by 7 kilometer area along with 112 industrial scale retorts, which are used in shale oil production (Qian, Wang, & Li, 2006). Four decades after this massive oil industry was built, production in Maoming slowed after a large deposit of shale oil was discovered in a different area of China, Da Qing. To compensate for the loss in revenue, the city expanded into chemical industries and constructed plants that produced ammonium sulfate and other chemical compounds ("Maoming," 2015; Qian et al., 2006). Maoming also remained active in the oil industry. Although Maoming was no longer a hotbed of oil extraction, the massive network of oil pipelines extending across the country provided the means by which to secure a steady influx of oil, which provided the raw material to sustain the refineries. As a result, Sinopec became the second largest state-owned oil

industry, with Maoming housing their headquarters. The city's coastal location is perfect for sustaining a robust export industry and Sinopec has helped secure Maoming's ranking as having the eighth highest GDP in Guangdong Province. To give an idea of its influence, the industry sector accounts for 41% of Maoming's GDP, with the production of petroleum and chemical products ranking as the two highest grossing industries in the city.

Maoming's success was an example of the "Guangdong Model" of development, which symbolizes "a more free market approach, rising inequality, and an export orientation" and stands in stark contrast to the "Chongqing Model" that looks "to revitalize socialist ideals and populist claims" put forth by Bo Xilai (Zhao, 2012, p. 1). After Bo Xilai's ousting, there was little support left for the more socialist leaning and people centered Chongqing Model as leaders turned to fast forward capitalist approach. Maoming grew as fast as possible with little regard to sustainability. As a result, the people and the environment suffered.

Sinopec's presence means that Maoming is by no means a stranger to factories and the pollution that comes with them. One interviewee stated that living in an industrial city meant "we encountered some pollution, a pungent taste," which was so thick people would walk faster to get away from it (Maoming interviewee 2, personal communication, 2015). Other media reports confirm that residents often complained about awful smells emanating from the surrounding plants (BBC, 2014). Residents, however, have had little recourse. In the words of 1 interviewee, "We want to get rid of the common chemical industry, but it won't go away" because they have existed in Maoming for so long and are deeply tied to the interests of the government (Maoming interviewee 3, personal

communication, 2015). Simply put, “Maoming, itself, is a heavy industrial zone” (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). When the PX plant was proposed, it would have added to the already industrial nature of the city. Maoming was the perfect site because PX is a derivative of oil and the city had the infrastructure to support such a plant. Moreover, as has been developed in the preceding chapters, the country was facing a growing PX shortage.

Thus, the approximately 1,000 people who united to oppose the proposed Paraxylene (PX) plant on March 30, 2014—a number that grew to estimates of anywhere between 7,000 and 20,000 as the protests continued—were facing an enormous hurdle. The PX factory they were protesting against was deeply entangled with over 60 years of oil infrastructure, a state-owned oil company, a city famous for corruption, and a country faced with a PX deficit. This may explain part of the reason why officials did not immediately halt plans for the project. The protests continued for days. The city did not see peace again until April 7.

This intertwining of oil, local government, corruption, and PX also distinguishes the Maoming protests as unique. The protests that occurred were not simply a fight against PX. As I will argue in this chapter, the Maoming protests represent the morphing of environmental protest to also include other related social issues. The 2014 Maoming protests were against PX *and* corruption. These protests are especially threatening to the local and central government because the people used an environmental platform to also address local corruption and demand political change beyond this single issue, thereby increasing the sense of civic duty that was and continues to threaten state-sanctioned nationalism. In addition to furthering my arguments concerning wild public networks,

forces majeure, and affective forces, this chapter contributes to social movement scholarship by tracing how the movement of the social can splinter and change course, thereby emphasizing movement.

Face(ing) Corruption

Just as Maoming is no stranger to industry, it is also no stranger to corruption. Networks of corruption run deep in Maoming and the relationships between government officials and industry are strong. A *force majeure* could, however, disrupt them.

Beginning in the 1980s, stories of corruption began slowly surfacing in the town. In 1982, a Maoming Shale Oil Plant party secretary was dismissed after he was found to have grossly exceeded the one child policy limit by having seven children (Wren, 1982). His high status afforded him the financial means to care for them, but it also put him in the public spotlight enough to draw attention to the issue. This case was the beginning of a long streak of corruption indictments. Just a few years later in 1988, four city officials were sent to prison for profiting from the illegal sales of automobiles and foreign exchange to the tune of $120,000. At this time, those found guilty of corruption were often "paraded on national television with shaven heads in manacles to discourage others from following in their footsteps and to bring shame on to their families" (Shariff, 1988, para. 75). As the numbers grew, the means of shaming changed, but corruption charges remained very public and garnered local media attention.

After these cases became public, the corruption networks in Maoming slowly started emerging into view. By 1993, corruption had become such a serious problem in Guangdong Province that officials set up an anti corruption bureau, which 4 years after

its inception already had 2,000 employees in 20 cities across the province and had handled 17,582 cases (*South China Morning Post*, 1993). One of these involved the head of the Maoming city development division, Jia Sukun, who took 110,000 yuan in bribes related to approving engineering tenders (*South China Morning Post*, 1993). This event marked a short respite during which corruption charges stayed out of the headlines of local newspapers. Instead, Maoming began appearing in academic journals and publication outlets such as *Fuel* (Guo & Ruan, 1995), *Oil and Gas Journal* (Piepul, 2001; "U.K. Firm to refinery expansion" 1994), *Asian Chemical News* (Lee, 2002; Tan, 2003, 2004), and *Chemical Week* (Alperowicz, 1993; Oey, 1998). The stories that appeared herein discuss Maoming in terms of transnational partnerships, oil, and chemical related ventures. This did not, however, mean that corruption itself had disappeared. After this boom in business, corruption cases once again rose to the surface, but this time with much greater force.

The introduction and widespread use of the Internet played no small part in exposing corruption and spreading news of what took place. In 2009, the Maoming prison's chief warden and seven senior prison officials were fired after an anonymous article published on the Internet exposed them as having had corrupt dealings with prisoners that resulted in 10 million yuan of annual profit for them (Tam, 2009). The article circulated in chat rooms, and after gaining enough attention, spurred an investigation that uncovered all sorts of illegal behavior. In 2009 alone, "377 senior officials were investigated for corruption related offences...and 80 of them received party disciplinary punishment" in Guangdong province (Lau, 2010).

Following the traces left via dealings and relationships, the aforementioned

investigation continued into the following year and eventually exposed the vicemayor of the city, Yang Guangliang. He was removed from his post for accepting bribes and selling official positions that earned him 34 million yuan. He was eventually sentenced to 19 years in prison. After he was arrested, 10 other high level officials were also either removed or taken away for investigation (He, 2010). This investigation moved from the lower level officials upward as the wild networks of corruption were traced. In 2010, Chen Shaoji, otherwise known as the "King of South China" for his influence in political circles and his role as chairman of the Guangdong committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, was investigated for corruption (Zhai, 2010). He was outed on the Internet by a Beijing reporter, whom he deceived about business prospects and with whom he had an affair. After he defaulted on his promises to her, she posted information about his extravagant lifestyle—one which he would never have been able to afford on his salary alone—as well as scandalous videos online for anyone with an Internet connection to see and share. Though this was not the first time the Internet had been used in this manner, "the growth of the Internet... allowed many such deeds to be exposed to the public" because citizens "have become increasingly intolerant of the abuses of power and corruption by government officials" (Xinhua, 2010, para. 6). With the public watching, those in power were left with no choice other than to sentence Chen. He received a suspended death sentence for corruption (meaning his sentence was commuted to life in prison).

Chen's arrest was just the beginning, as investigators traced corruption up the power ladder. His sentencing led to the investigation of over 100 senior officials from around Guangdong. In 2011, right after the start of the Spring Festival, Luo Yinguo, the city's

Communist Party boss, was asked to travel to the provincial offices for a meeting with the Guangdong Provincial Committee, but no sooner did he arrive than he was detained for corruption charges. After searching his home and office, investigators found more than 10 million yuan in cash. Just a few days later the party head of Maogang district, Zhong Huoming, and deputy head of the district, Tan Weihua, were also taken away for questioning (He, 2011). Maoming officials as well as officials from across Guangdong province were being investigated and charged at levels and in numbers never before seen.

The same month Luo was detained, then Premier Wen Jiaobao conducted an interview with *Xinhua News*. This interview was unique in that it was formatted around questions and commentary from Netizens (Xinhua, 2011). This format is demonstrative of the fact that officials and news media alike could not ignore the influence of the Internet on local and national issues, and so Premier Wen was asked to respond to the common people directly. Nearly one million netizens submitted their questions to Wen, and many asked him to address China's rampant corruption. Wen was asked to respond to a number of Netizen questions, which he did not just in this interview but also in subsequent conversations with the media.

Pathways of Panmediation

This interview makes clear that China's various landscapes were changing, and so too were the ways in which the people and their leaders were interacting. An authoritarian government leader was conversing directly with the people to listen to and address their concerns. What spawned this new and direct connection between the people and their leader? China's changing economic status was one factor that made this kind of

interaction possible. In 2011, then President Hu Jintao led China to overtake Japan as the world's second largest economy. Many people in China were being lifted out of poverty and catapulted into an increasingly panmediated world in which computers and smartphones were progressively available and people were adopting them as quickly as they were released.

This brings me to the second major factor at play. Social media in China were flourishing, with over 235 million social network users by the beginning of 2011. Netizens had created substantial intersecting systems via Weibo and QQ over which they could disseminate information quickly and do so without having to adhere to the same strict regulations that govern mass media. The Internet was becoming recognized as a tool the masses could use to unite not just to share innocuous photos and messages, but also to participate in the political system. And some Chinese did adopt the Internet to foment change. Murmurs of a Jasmine Revolution had flitted over social media that year, frightening leaders across the country and prompting officials to increase censorship and preemptively detain a number of people including lawyers and outspoken human rights advocates (FlorCruz, 2011). The networks were growing quickly and wildly in ways that made them difficult to contain or control.

Simultaneously, other networks were also developing at breakneck speed that connected people in different ways. The third major factor at play was that China was creating an impressive system of high-speed railways that linked cities across the country. This was occurring as families were, for the first time since the forced move during Cultural Revolution, moving away from one another in large numbers. People in rural areas were packing up and opting to take their chances in big cities. Children were

going away to college and not necessarily moving back home. In 2011 alone, 21 million people moved from rural to urban areas, bringing the ratio of city dwellers to above 50% that year (Simpson, 2012). This meant more people were traveling more and intersecting with one another.

Communication and travel networks were developing side by side, and these were shifting the way people interacted as well as with whom they connected, making the networks people were navigating increasingly more wild. For example, since more people were going to college and then moving to a new place to find a job, they had social circles in their hometown, college social circles, and professional circles, thereby joining people from different places. People were able to stay in contact from afar via social media, and this meant that people were becoming more and more attached to Weibo and QZone to maintain relationships. This also meant that local news often no longer remained local because it could spread across the country via various social media platforms. People back at home were telling those who moved away what was happening. Whereas previously, local issues were often kept private, new networks offered the potential for these news stories to garner national and international attention—something that threatened local networks of corruption by putting them on a national stage. This transition from the local staying local to the local going national was apparent when two trains collided on the newly constructed high speed rails in Wenzhou in July of 2011 killing over 40 and injuring over 200 people, which I touched upon briefly in the previous chapter but want to elaborate on here. Reports and images of the event spread far and fast over social media, creating China's first online *huo,* or firestorm. Reports of what had occurred were immediately disseminated over social media feeds. Weibo was home to

the most vibrant discussions and within "less than an hour [after the accident], staff at Sina Weibo had set up a page devoted to the train crash that served as a major platform for the online debate" (Bondes & Schucher, 2014, p. 51).

Though local officials literally tried to cover up the crash by burying the train and, in the media, by forbidding news agencies to send reporters to the actual site, images of the accident taken by average citizens bounced from screen to screen along with calls for help and action. Within just over a week, the incident engaged over ten million people to participate in heated conversations about what was happening, who was responsible, and what should be done (Bondes & Schucher, 2014). These discussions drew attention to the issue and to the corruption that clearly played a role in causing the crash. After an investigation, the minister of railways, Liu Zhijun, was dismissed from his office on corruption charges. This would not be the last mass online movement for China. However, before I go on, I want to turn briefly to how the wild public networks that were growing and expanding were predicated on a particular economic situation that made possible certain forms of corruption.

Economic Relationships

The stakes over corruption were mounting as China's economy continued to grow at a heretofore unseen pace. The temptation to fall prey to corruption was exacerbated by China's tax system, which was set up in such a way that it made taking bribes easy. China's tax system depends heavily on industry for revenue rather than individual income tax, which makes sense in a country where according to the World Bank, the average annual income was $5,000 in 2011. Since Deng Xiaoping's decentralization of power in

the 1980s transferred much of the decision making to local authorities, the local officials were the ones responsible for generating local revenue and the easiest way to do so, especially for poor areas, was by bringing in big industries and the tax revenue that accompanied them. China's period of economic reform also changed the rules of the game in that it welcomed different strains of international businesses that were happy to come in and take advantage of China's cheap labor and lack of environmental regulations, lack of knowledge about environmental laws, or their willingness to overlook such laws. Local officials knew that these companies would not only bring in revenue for the area under their jurisdiction, but they would also increase their own personal bonuses and bribes, so the monetary incentives to solicit factories to come to one's city or town were quite tantalizing.

A further influx of foreign business came with the expiration of the Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA) in 2005, which (when in effect) imposed limits on the amount of goods small countries could export. This was done so to help spread out the manufacturing, but also limited the scale of production. Thus, buyers with a high level of demand like the U.S. had to turn to multiple different countries in Southeast Asia to meet their needs rather than, for example, concentrating their production solely in China or Vietnam. Once the agreement expired, however, U.S. buyers could consolidate the number of countries from which they outsourced, and China became the beneficiary of these movements largely because of its size and massive labor force, taking business from other small developing countries (Hung, 2009). As a result of these massive consolidations, many manufacturers looked to China to establish factory complexes, and cities around the country vied for bids by offering companies everything from tax breaks

to resources.

Maoming Networks

Maoming, as it moved from being a hub for oil shale to also become a hub for chemical industries and petroleum processing, ultimately became a highly industrialized city that courted foreign companies for the above described reasons. In light of the economic changes, the fact that corruption was spreading in Maoming should not be surprising. Neither should it be surprising that much of the corruption could be traced back to Sinopec.

Sinopec Maoming Petrochemical Company was and continues to be the largest company in Maoming. The state-owned business was founded in 1955 and has its hands in both the oil and chemical industries that compose much of Maoming's industrial area. Sinopec alone has partnered with international companies, including Honeywell, Phillips 66, and even McDonald's (where you can fill up on gas at drivethrus). Sinopec's investment and ties to oil means that it and the city are both also deeply enmeshed in the global oil trade, which connects it to places including Kuwait and Qatar and to oil giants including Shell, BP, Exxon Mobil, and Saudi Aramco (Chen, 2014; Sinopec, 2015b). On its company website, Sinopec boasts its worldwide success in targeting "markets including the Middle East, Russia, Africa, [and] Southeast Asia" as well as its export of their "own technology to Malaysia, natural gas compressors to Africa, high impact tank plate [sic] to Iran and hightech coil heat exchanger [sic] to Taiwan" (Sinopec, 2015a). Sinopec's success means it is a large and important revenue generator for Maoming's local economy and that it was tied to local officials, with whom it had to work closely. It

also means corruption was likely lurking in the company's ranks.

The corruption charges being leveled in 2011, however, did not touch the oil industry explicitly in Maoming and, instead, focused heavily on government officials. In fact, corruption was so problematic for the Maoming local government that 46 new senior officials had to be recruited in 1 month after a graft investigation left dozens of empty seats in office (Tam, 2011). Moreover, each graft investigation implicated more officials as the rhizomatic connections of the canopy of corruption were traced. The networks of relationships—which can be better understood as *guanxi*—were, indeed, both tangled and complicated. However, they were an integral part of both government and business in China, especially within a one-party system. Xie and Mol (2006) help to explain why:

> ...in the hierarchical one-party political system, individual networks are an essential element in successfully accessing government.... In the economic realm, industries construct, maintain and utilize *guanxi* frequently..."private" economic actors tend to rely on *guanxi* and a gift economy to organize the necessary resources to keep their business going. (p. 276)

Thus, to investigate the officials is to trace a system of *guanxi* gone corrupt.

If Xie and Mol (2006) are correct in asserting that systems of *guanxi* function as "a mechanism for coping with the absence of a formal and reliable system of laws and regulations" (p. 276), then these mechanisms may have strengthened in the wake of the massive decentralization of power that occurred during China's opening up when local officials had to take on new responsibilities within an unfamiliar and nebulous system characterized mostly by change rather than rigid rules. This is evident in testimony from Zhu Yuying, former vice director of the Standing Committee of the Municipal People's Congress, who was convicted of corruption. When confessing as to why he turned to corruption during his trial, he said, "I didn't dare to accept bribes at the beginning...but in

my 50s, I found my family was extremely poor compared to others. I started to accept bribes from 2006 and couldn't stop because bribe-givers would be angry if I didn't accept their money" (Tam, 2012, para. 8). The channels of bribery were deep seated and corruption was so ingrained that one could not hold office without participating. In Maoming, by 2013, the plants operating there had already "been in operation for more than 50 years and...produce[d] 1 million tons of petrochemicals a year" ("Honeywell to Modernize," 2013, para. 2). Thus, the systems of *guanxi* in Maoming had been shifting, morphing, and growing around and through new economic and political pathways since the 1950s, and with them, many avenues for corrupt practices.

Shifting Networks of Corruption

The corruption that was plaguing China in the 21st century was different than that which had preceded it. China, up until about 2002, "had what [Overholt] would characterize as well-managed emerging-nation corruption," meaning that, "as is true almost everywhere, most officials had a palm outstretched expecting grease, but the amounts were proportionately modest, the corruption did not detract much from economic efficiency, and it did not undermine political legitimacy" (Overholt, 2013, para. 3). However, by the end of the first decade of the new century, corruption had become more serious and more rampant. Once one string was pulled in the fabric of corruption, it elicited a chain reaction of unraveling. As is the case with ecological systems, if one node in the network is removed, the repercussions are felt throughout the entire system. Thus, the investigations of Maoming officials in 2011 did not stop there, but led to the arrest of the director of the Guangdong party committee's United Front

Work Department and a member of its standing committee, Dr. Zhou Zhenhong, in 2012. The previously mentioned investigation of Luo Yinguo implicated 24 city level officials and 218 county level officials in Maoming (Yan, 2012). Once the widespread nature of the corruption was made apparent, the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) sent more than 70 graft busters to Maoming to further investigate the issues. The number of local officials implicated quickly rose to around 300. Exposing the networks of corruption meant that people were beginning to view officials differently. Their relationship with the government was deteriorating and would ultimately become an important factor in the coalescing of a *force majeure.*

The influx of investigators to Maoming was connected to Xi Jinping's pledge to crack down on corruption shortly after he took over as China's president in 2012, though it was only the beginning. When Xi assumed power, he did so "at a moment when China, despite its economic success, was politically adrift. The Chinese Communist Party, plagued by corruption and lacking a compelling ideology, had lost credibility among the public, and social unrest was on the rise" (Economy, 2014, para. 2). Evidence of Xi's commitment to weeding out corruption was a moral and far reaching one (as well as political and self serving) that can be traced back to before he became Party leader. In 2004, at an antigraft conference, "he warned officials: 'Rein in your spouses, children, relatives, friends and staff, and vow not to use power for personal gain'" (MacFarquhar, 2015, para. 8). Xi followed through with his pledge. In 2013, just a year after he took office, 182,000 officials had already been punished for corruption, which surpassed the annual average for the previous 5 years by over 50,000 (Economy, 2014). In 2014, over 71,000 officials were punished for violating anticorruption rules (MacFarquhar, 2015).

Xi's campaign also called upon the masses to participate "by allowing some oversight online, either through the microblogging site Weibo or the official 'informant pages.' It [was] also very cognizant of the risk that things could spiral out of control" (Bishop, 2013, para. 3). Netizens had been discussing corruption for several years over social media and using it as a platform to expose offenses. Link and Qiang (2013) examine one case that occurred in 2008 when video of a Communist Party official trying to molest a young 11-year-old girl in the bathroom of a restaurant in Shenzhen was released on the Internet and went viral. The official, Lin Jiaxiang, was woefully unaware that his behavior had been captured on tape when the father of the young girl confronted him about what had happened. Lin yelled at the man, telling him his rank placed Lin far above the man and that "You people are farts to me!" (Link & Qiang, 2013, p. 83). After the video was released, Lin was fired from office and "fart people" became a term of pride used by netizens to describe themselves.

This was only one episode of many. Anyone with a cell phone also had a camera in their pocket, which they used to expose corruption in cities and towns across the country. Some snapped pictures of local officials wearing multiple different expensive watches, driving cars way out of a civil servant's price range, and interacting with mistresses and prostitutes. They then uploaded this visual evidence of corruption onto Weibo, where their behavior was exposed to the public. This move not only gave the *laobaixing,* or common people, a means of participating in the corruption purges, but also established new connections, relationships, and networks between people over social media. Thus, while the corrupt were being exposed by following bribery networks that caused their (at least partial) collapse, netizens were extending theirs and, like a patch of grass, began

spreading rhizomatically across China. This growth, initially, did not pose a threat, but would become something the government found could threaten their stability.

Attacking Corruption from Both Sides

This growth of relationships among the common people via online networks is monumental. Link and Qiang (2013) agree, arguing that of

> all the transformations that Chinese society has undergone over the past fifteen years, the most dramatic has been the growth of the Internet. Information now circulates and public opinions are now expressed on electronic bulletin boards with nationwide reach. (p. 79)

Moreover, they are able to exchange and spread information despite complicated and massive censorship apparatuses. Since the concurrent development of the Internet and censorship tools, "Chinese netizens have shown that they possess boundless creativity and ingenuity in finding such ways to express themselves despite stifling government restrictions on online speech" and that, "with their growing numbers, expanding social networks, and increasing influence, seem to be evolving from 'voices under domination' to 'networked agents of change'" (Link & Qiang, 2013, pp. 81, 85).

At the same time netizens were using online networks to expose local and provincial level government representatives, President Xi was also investigating high-ranking officials, which stirred fear and unrest in the upper echelons of the CCP. In 2014, Zhou Yongkang, the former head of China's security service, was brought in on corruption charges, which made front page headlines around the globe and reverberated across social media. As soon as the information was released, it began quickly bouncing across smartphone screens, stirring conversations across China. Zhou was the most senior official to be fired under Xi's antigraft campaign and in the history of the People's

Republic (MacFarquhar, 2015).

Once Zhou came under scrutiny, an investigation made clear three interlocking systems implicated in corruption—national politics, oil, and regional power (Wu, 2015). Zhou had deep ties to the oil industry. He worked for China National Petroleum Corporation (the country's largest oil and gas producer) for over 30 years. He got his start working in the oil fields after graduating from Beijing Petroleum Institute in 1966 with a degree in geophysical survey and exploration and rose up the ranks, developing ties with local authorities that would help him transition from a position with a state-owned enterprise (SOE) to a seat in the local government (Wu, 2015). In 2002, Zhou was promoted to member of the Politburo, and then, later that year, the minister of public security. Though he transitioned to political life his ties to the oil industry still were strong, as is evidenced by the fact that his son, Zhou Bin, became an oil and gas executive with ties to Texas.

Five years later in 2007, Zhou Yongkang rose to China's highest level decision-making body and was appointed chairman of the Central Political and Legislative Affairs Commission, a position he held until his retirement. This means that Zhou was responsible for security during the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the period of time during which threats of a Jasmine Revolution proliferated in 2011. In 2012, Zhou retired, but this did not render him exempt from investigation. When Zhou was finally sentenced to life in jail in June 2015, the charges brought against him included corruption, abuse of power, and leaking state secrets. Along with his wife and son, he was said to have amassed 2.1 billion yuan in illegal income.

The networks exposed by Zhou's arrest and sentencing, to some degree, mirror and

extend the networks of corruption in Maoming and the larger Guangdong province. It also helps to illustrate how deeply tied oil and government are at local and national levels, and how deeply corruption runs. After the growth and widespread adoption of the Internet, these networks of corruption had to contend with growing networks of citizen/activists tired of corruption. This quickly expanding system of social networks offered the common people an alternative means of sharing information as well as a way to unite en masse against the deep roots of corruption in rhizomatic fashion.

A Return to Protests: Battling the Rhizomatic Reaches of Skepticism and Mistrust

The landscape of mistrust in China, and especially Maoming, is an important component in and surrounding the Maoming anti-PX protests because it had cultivated a deep distrust in government officials that would influence the form and force of the events that unfolded. This changing relationship between citizens and their local officials is important to map in tracing the movement of the social because, for many people in Maoming, it "forced a reconfiguration of the self along different lines" (Harold & DeLuca, p. 280). The people had to civically engage to stop corruption that was bringing a PX plant to Maoming. They had to enact a different form of citizenship.

The PX plant proposal that prompted the 2014 protests was a joint venture between the city and the state-owned Sinopec. The two had been partnering on the plans for a period of time before they were made public. Failing to inform the public is a move that is questionable at best according to protocol, which stipulates that an environmental impact statement must be conducted to assess the relative danger of the project, which

then must be made public. After this occurs, residents must be given an opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions during a public comment period. However, plans for the PX plant were publicly announced in March and not preceded by an EIS, but instead by a propaganda push that included press releases, television segments, and newspaper articles touting the economic benefits of the plant as well as the safety of PX beginning as early as October 2013, or 6 months before the protests.

In the weeks before the protest, 100,000 households received brochures that promoted the plant and all it could bring to Maoming (Tiezzi, 2014). During this time, government officials also campaigned for popular approval by having schools circulate a petition of support for the proposed PX plant. Teachers were asked to have students and their parents sign the form, thereby agreeing to not only endorse the project but also refrain from becoming involved in any potential protests against the plant. When some refused, the government threatened to prevent their children from graduating and/or to expel them. A similar tactic was used with employees of Sinopec, though the threats leveraged against them related to their schedules and wages (Lee & Ho, 2014). In all government-owned businesses, employees were asked to sign a form agreeing to refrain from joining protests against the plant.

Though many people did end up signing the agreement, this strategy backfired horribly. When word of the government's coercive tactics spread among citizens, it fueled outrage and exacerbated the public's mistrust of officials over wild public networks. Maoming residents were still reeling from the aforementioned graft investigation that led to the arrest of 300 officials. They did not look favorably on coercive tactics. This mistrust would serve as one of the main motivating factors for the

violent protests and would guide people's interpretation of the events that unfolded.

Mass Media as a Mouthpiece With No Voice

In addition to the letters of commitment, the government also staged a press conference that was broadcast on local television. According to a television employee from Maoming, this news conference simply sang "the praises of the leadership," discussed "how good the PX project was for economic development," and talked about how little pollution it would cause (Maoming interviewee 6, personal communication, 2015). It was not followed by questions or comments from residents, nor did reporters offer any critical engagement of the information presented—not because they did not want to, but because they simply *could not* do so. According to the same employee, "the television industry is unable to engage in critical reporting" and can only report "facts" (Maoming interviewee 6, personal communication, 2015). Thus, reporters simply publicized what the government asked them to without engaging. Reporters, as local media, "cannot criticize the local government. You cannot cross this line" (Maoming interviewee 6, personal communication, 2015).

As a result, according to another local mainstream media employee, the general public does not view mass media reports as credible. She remarked, "Of course we cannot gain the public's trust" (Maoming interviewee 4, personal communication, 2015). People treat local television and newspapers simply as the government's mouthpiece and "prefer to believe the media reports on the Internet because those sites reflect the views of the common people.... They [online media] have the public's trust" whereas mainstream media are viewed as "standing on the side of the government" (Maoming

interviewee 4, personal communication, 2015).

This was reflected in the interviews with protestors as well as the online discussions. One interviewee stated that he thought the press conference "was not worth watching" because it was "just bureaucratic jargon" with no content (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015). Another said that, though she did hear about the press conference, she did not watch it because she gets most of her news and information from QQ. She was unsatisfied with the press conference, as she understood it, because "they didn't have any public deliberation" (Maoming interviewee 2, personal communication, 2015). After such a long and intense battle with corruption, people were not content with one-sided conversations with leaders. Another interview put it simply: "If I was satisfied [with the press conference], I estimate that everyone wouldn't have demonstrated in opposition" (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). Indeed, if people had trust in their officials and if the official press had the power to curate a robust conversation with their leaders, perhaps the protests would not have occurred.

Thus, when officials try to use the power of the mainstream media, they are placing their eggs in the wrong basket, so to speak, because "the media did not have the ability to guide public opinion" (Maoming interviewee 6, personal communication, 2015). Nor are they a trusted source of information about the environment. The television employees know this. They are aware that "younger generations can find information on the web and various other channels. The middle-aged and older generations then can get information from the younger generations and via word of mouth" (Maoming interviewee 6, personal communication, 2015). Wild public networks overlap to transmit information. Citizens are no longer looking to official media reports because their reporters are not critical. In

short, local media's ability to successfully disseminate environmental information is "very small" (Maoming interviewee 6, personal communication, 2015). The skepticism in anything the government released indicates a shift in relationships. Lacking trust in their government, people moved to new networks.

Weixin Webs and QZones Swell to a *Force Majeure*

As mistrust, skepticism, anger, and fear swelled in reaction to the proposed PX plans, a *force majeure* once again arose. As we think through *force majeure* in this chapter, I will turn to Massumi's (2011) musings on activism to draw attention to the subtleties and nuances of an activist event capable of moving the social:

> The elements have to come together just so, in just this disjunctive way, for the effect to lift off. The timing has to be right. The elements have to been brought into just the right proximity, in just the right way so that they detonate into a self-detaching experiential event. Technique is everything. . . . The appearance of the effect is a spontaneous experiential combustion event. But the setting-in of the conditions is *prepared*. Meticulously prepared. (p. 148, emphasis in original)

Massumi (2011) goes on to clarify that the "preparation may be classifiable as 'naturally' occurring" and that "human" and "cultural" conditions should be considered as "natural" (p. 148). As I delve into the pulsating networks that helped to connect elements *in just this disjunctive way,* I want to emphasize that the conditions at hand created a *spontaneous experiential combustion event* in which accumulations of agency that I have traced thus far were dispersed among many different factors. As I track the moving and shifting networks, I want to emphasize that the factors at play are, in many ways, unique from the preceding case studies and that there is no formula for protest; no single agent could meticulously plan what was about to transpire.

The lack of trust in local government and local media led to a heightened dependence

on social media, which came to play no small role in the Maoming uprisings and the toppling of government plans. During the protests, the wild public networks that connected Weibo, QZone, WeChat, and other social media platforms served multiple functions that influenced the tenor of the protests by 1) linking information seekers to news about past protests; 2) providing a platform by which people could find information outside mass media outlets; and 3) providing access to networks wild enough to offer the movement, slipperiness, and space to evade the censorship practices in place.

People in Maoming followed the pathways forged by the Internet to link themselves to existing discussions about PX. Many of the protestors, after performing online searches about PX, found pages and pages of results about the protests that had occurred in other cities. They read stories about the people in Xiamen who marched through the streets. They saw images of people carrying signs and shouting slogans. They read the blogs that Lian Yue wrote discussing what PX could do and how *not* opposing the plant would mean the people of Xiamen would be considered "weak and dim-witted." They saw video of the mayor of Dalian standing atop a van with a megaphone announcing the government would move the PX plant. They saw the images of people carrying signs and shouting on the local government's lawn. Social media networks helped to connect and spread (mis)information and to wildly link people from Maoming to the 2007 protestors in Xiamen and the 2011 protestors in Dalian. These relationships waxed as people's relationships with officials waned.

When protestors in Maoming searched for "PX" on Baidu, they found "reports on the Internet. If you opened them, you could see all the headlines.... Before we knew about these protests, we had no understanding of PX" (Maoming interviewee 3, personal

communication, 2015). As has been previously established, the Internet in China is saturated with stories on Xiamen's 2007 PX protest. A Baidu search for "PX protest Xiamen" in October of 2015 produced approximately 2,000,000 results on Baidu from China without a VPN. Within these results is a hodgepodge of propaganda, rants, affective appeals, information, and news stories. The articles that appear are then littered with links to stories about other protests in cities across China as well as literature on PX to which readers can link on an ever expanding web of information.

One participant said that after the project was announced in Maoming, "everyone went [online] to check for information, and after that, everyone knew about Dalian. A lot of people also made reference to Xiamen, where the opposition was greater" (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). As 1 participant pointed out, "In fact it wasn't just the Xiamen protests, but also several other places that protested against PX... other places, indeed, followed in Xiamen's footsteps." Even the government's mouthpiece, *People's Daily,* when covering the Maoming protests referred back to the Xiamen protests and condemned the leaders for acquiescing to the people. The respondents from the mass media in Maoming agreed that the enormous amount of media coverage available online helped to provoke further protests, including the one in their city. One employee said that the Maoming people saw the opposition online that had occurred across China and asked, "If it [PX] is good, why do other cities not want it?" (Maoming interviewee 6, personal communication, 2015). The long list of successful anti-PX protests fueled further distrust because related reports indicated PX was dangerous and because other local governments cancelled plans. The fact that local governments were succumbing to the people was evidence enough for many of an

implicit admission of wrongdoing.

Once people found out about the "success in Xiamen," "they studied it as a reference" (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). One interviewee stated that Xiamen proved to be a main source of inspiration for what would transpire in the streets of Maoming because the online reports "were all very positive" (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). Another participant recalled that "during [their] discussions about the protest, [they] were saying that Xiamen should be a model" (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015). While it became standard to turn to Xiamen when dealing with PX, one protestor noted that the exact same model could not be applied because the circumstances in each town are different. He said, "we studied it as a reference," but could not completely mimic it because "Maoming's corruption is much greater" (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015).

This observation adds insight into one of the shortcomings of looking to wild networks for information. Though people could look online for information about protests in Xiamen, Dalian, Chengdu, and Kunming, these reports were partial and largely produced by amateur citizen journalists. As one mass media employee put it, "social media give them access to and perceptions of environmental risks and knowledge about the environment," but this awareness "does not come from their own participation in the environmental movement; it comes from what they see about the worsening environmental problems in the media" (Maoming interviewee 4, personal communication, 2015). She went on to say, "for example, the Xiamen protests influenced and inspired [the people's] perceptions of environmental awareness," but no organization helped people to interpret these findings (Maoming interviewee 4, personal

communication, 2015). Thus, when the citizens of Maoming confronted this vast array of information, they interpreted it through a lens of distrust that was fostered by rampant corruption. For example, some protestors thought the plant being proposed in Maoming was a relocation of the plant proposed for Xiamen. In other words, they thought officials were trying to relocate the failed Xiamen plant to Maoming even though the Xiamen PX plant had been relocated to Zhangzhou years ago. As one media employees put it, "this situation and the logic that drives it are totally a result of the authorities' long-term control over the media and the lack of public trust" (Maoming interviewee 6, personal communication, 2015).

The people do, however, trust their friends and compatriots, many of whom are active on social media. This brings me to my second point: social media offered the level of trust necessary to raise opposition, organize a demonstration, and draw further support. Social media provided connections that were supplanting ones they could have had with officials, evidencing a movement of the social to social media. Though largely decentralized, word of the gatherings extended rhizomatically across networks via "hyperactive microblogger communit[ies]" who shared and reposted information (Smart, 2014). This helped to gather the first wave of protestors who marched in front of government offices on March 30, 2014. When asked how they found out about the protests, each interviewee pointed to social media. One stated that she found information "on the Internet, for example, QZone, QQ groups, and friend circles. Two or three days before the protest, a lot of people posted about [PX]" (Maoming interviewee 2, personal communication, 2015). According to the same interviewee, "everyone knew this event was happening in Maoming" because information was forwarded among and between

friend groups. Another participant found that "everything was on these platforms. I use QQ and Weixin all the time" (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2014). He looked to these platforms and participated by forwarding information because "what other people sent was intended to help us understand the facts. We could forward it to our circle of friends or some acquaintances.... Everyone would share their online searches so they could better understand" (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). This was true for others as well, one of whom said it was through a QQ friend group that he found out about plans for the plant and information "about Maoming wanting to build the PX project" (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2014).

Information about PX, news stories, and the planned stroll could all be found on the Internet. Once the protests began, images started circulating, which brought curious onlookers from near and far. People wanted to witness this event, which would certainly become an important historical moment for the city. One person, who went to the protests said he went "to see the action" after reading about it on social media and seeing images (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015). Once he arrived, he found that "the scene was very shocking. More than 1,000 people were there and it felt like they were very passionate" (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015). But before long, he was interpolated into the protest activities. After the police dispersed the crowds, they selected five people to be representatives and attend a meeting about the proposed PX plant.

Another person who attended the protests found information about the event on QQ and forwarded information out to her friends because "forwarding is a way we could let a few more people know this event was happening in Maoming" (Maoming interviewee 2,

personal communication, 2015). As the number of violent images increased, so too did the number of protestors and onlookers. According to Lee and Ho (2014), "[s]ome people decided to join the rally because they felt angry after seeing pictures of police suppression" (p. 38). Anger and outrage increased when images of injured bodies and people lying in pools of blood started bouncing across social media feeds. Anger, especially when related to issues of domestic social problems, "can spread quickly as the users want to show their sympathy to the victims by retweeting tweets and criticizing the criminals or the government" (Fan et al., 2014, p. 6). This brought even more people to the streets and increased the amount and speed of information traveling across QQ, Weibo, and Weixin. Although most of the most violent pictures were a sham and were not taken in Maoming, they still had force, and brought people to the streets.

The impact of these rumors was intensified by the fact that there "were no professional journalists on the spot to report on the anti-PX rally, [so] participants had to play the dual role of protesting and news-making.... Maoming protestors could only rely on social media" (Lee & Ho, 2014, p. 38). Censorship and distrust in the local media drove people online. This is part of the reason why people became so engaged on their smartphones—because they needed to become decentered knots of news making so the event did not go undocumented and could not be covered up like officials attempted to do with the Wenzhou train incident. This strategy worked. Local and international news outlets picked up the story along with the images, which were gathered from social media feeds, including Weibo. Social media became a way to organize protestors, rally crowds, document events, disseminate information, and raise awareness beyond their borders.

The government was aware of the activity occurring on social media, but launching

successful censorship practices becomes difficult on wild public networks. Protest participants were able to fly under the radar of censorship and then circumvent it by utilizing more private platforms, word play, and by creating a dynamic flow of information censors could not immediately trace. First, the fact that information was being circulated among friend groups on QQ and Weixin is important because that means it was not drawing attention the same way a more public discussion on Weibo, for example, would. The protestors using QQ were circulating information within friend groups, where only those in the group can see the information. Weixin also privileges privacy. If a user posts on her/his Weixin "Moments" feed, only those people who are friends with that user can see the post. Friends of friends can access neither the post nor the comments to it. Weixin has a private group chat feature in which you can send messages to a select group of people, which will remain private. Though some commentators decreed the turn toward privacy on Weixin to be the death knell for social movements (Davison, 2012; "From Weibo to WeChat," 2014), it has proven to be an enormous asset for protestors. According to Lee and Ho (2014),

> WeChat [Weixin] became the only online channel relatively free from official Internet surveillance. Information on WeChat was shared on the basis of friendship, which certainly limited the scope of its circulation. Nevertheless, this drawback was compensated by greater reliability, because receivers tended to know senders on a personal basis. (p. 38)

Much of the information was being circulated between friends, not publicly where it could be shared and commented on—both actions that would draw the attention of authorities and cause a feed to be censored. Therefore, the *lack* of public dissemination helped to insure that the information could and would travel, which it did as it bounced between friend groups.

Of course, much of what was posted was censored: "It wasn't just Weibo. On QQ forums, attachments and content was also deleted. If the content was related to PX, it was very easy for it to disappear in a short amount of time" (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). Much can be learned from what is missing from contemporary discourses (Wander, 1984). According to *China Digital Times'* list of censored words on Weibo, the words *Maoming* and *PX* were blocked on the first day of the protest, March 31, 2014. According to the spreadsheet, no additional censorship occurred for several days. However, after both legitimate and fake images of injured and bloodied protestors began circulating in the following days, on April 5, 2014, the censored search terms grew exponentially to include *Maoming+take to the streets+take a walk, Maoming+assemble, Maoming+march, Maoming+demonstration, Maoming+conflict, Maoming+massacre, Maoming+tank, Maoming+police, Maoming+bloody, Maoming+petrochemical engineering project, Maoming+chemical industry*, and *Maoming+P[X]*. The numbers of people and force of indignation were increasing as images of the violence made their way onto the smartphone screens people were refreshing every couple minutes. The government reacted by attempting to interrupt those flows, to cut connections, and to turn images of bloodied bodies into error messages.

Panicked local officials went even further than simply censoring. In some cases, whole friend groups were either deleted or the chat function was shut off. However, the censors were often at least a few minutes behind the people posting:

> ...usually about 30 minutes afterwards [after posting], it was deleted. Everyone was more attentive. If you checked within 10 minutes, you could see it once...Everyone was looking at a certain time...usually it was early in the morning or late at night. (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015).

Another participant discussed the windows of opportunity amidst censorship: "I also saw

[news about the protests] several times on Weibo. Usually you could see it late at night...one or two in the morning...and then the next morning they were usually deleted" (Maoming interviewee 5, personal communication, 2015). If the content was sensitive, people checked often, stayed up into the wee hours of the night, and immediately downloaded anything they wanted to keep.

In times of protest, when networks swell and tremor with activity simultaneously generated by thousands of citizens turned activists, government officials, and onlookers, people adopt new practices of looking and new habits of engagement. If participants and spectators want to follow what is happening, they must look often, upload strategically, and download quickly. Speed becomes an important ally for protestors, which is an important characteristic of social media. These new practices then impact how people process the events. Careful deliberation is not an option; "[s]peed and images, singly and in concert, annihilate contemplation" as people "make do in this new civic space" characterized by moving and shifting networks (DeLuca, 2006, p. 89). People are being barraged with information and interpreting it quickly. This information is processed within a certain network of relationships, and the relationships of trust between citizens often trump the relationship between the people and their government in these events. Speed is a must and, therefore, integral to protests.

As information is flying across platforms and more and more bodies are gathering, government officials must quickly assess and deal with the situation. Censorship becomes a standard tool in attempts to tame the masses, as was the case in Maoming. Before it was censored, however, the government attempted to use its own Weibo account to discourage protestors from gathering by deeming the activity illegal that was "seriously

disturbing social order." This post garnered more than 1,300 comments, many of which

> criticized both the government's handling of the protest as well as its involvement in the petrochemical plant. One Weibo user asked rhetorically, "Who has ever seen an application for protest be approved?" In another popular comment, one user suggested sarcastically that in order to prove the plant is not harmful, Maoming officials should move their offices and homes next door, and "send their family members to work at the plant." (Allen-Ebrahimian, 2014, para. 4)

The government responded to these criticisms by running a front page article in the *Maoming Daily* about the safety of PX as well as its importance in the country.

This tactic failed miserably in an environment in which people deeply distrusted their government, and after a few days, officials turned to censorship to curb the flow of information. The use of censorship, however, is rarely entirely effective and can often draw more attention to what is being censored rather than eliminating it. This is, in part, because platforms are never used singularly, but always in conjunction with other platforms. Weibo feeds crisscross with Weixin chat groups. Information that was downloaded and saved before it was deleted on QQ can be uploaded elsewhere. Digital technologies, according to Massumi (2011), are "an expanding network of connective and fusional potentials" (p. 81) that are constantly connecting. Wild public networks are too tangled for censorship to be a cureall. Information appears on multiple feeds simultaneously, people employ code words to get around censors, users download information they find sensitive, images that have lain dormant for days or weeks resurface once censors let down their guard, onlookers from other countries can access information on wild public networks and spread information of the event, and the error message telling users that the search term *Maoming* produces no results can draw more attention to what is happening.

The ability of censored information to create a higher demand is something the

government has witnessed numerous times. For example, when the politically leaning posts of well known blogger Han Han were censored, it was "an act witnessed by millions of casual Internet users who, otherwise, were happy to live their lives without ever dwelling on the patronizing mechanics of censorship" (Osnos, 2014, p. 200). As a result, the censors did not silence Han Han, but rather incited awareness and outrage. Similarly, when censorship occurred surrounding the Maoming protests, it only increased the people's mistrust in their government and drew further attention to the events and violence from casual onlookers. As soon as people found out their government was cutting off flows of information on social media, they increased their allegiance to the platforms and distanced themselves from their government. The greater the efforts at silencing were, the greater the resistance in Maoming. The censors did, indeed, fail to stop the protests, and so did the violence.

Over the course of the protests, the elements came "together just so, in just this disjunctive way"; the timing was right; the elements were "brought into just the right proximity, in just the right way so that they detonate into a self-detaching experiential event" (Massumi, 2011, p. 148) that forced renegotiations between the people of Maoming, Sinopec, local officials, and the central government. The social shifted.

After 3 days of unruly protests, officials announced that they would meet with representatives from the public and hold a press conference. When the meeting finally occurred several days later, it was moved from the original site at the last minute, ostensibly to discourage protestors from gathering outside the location of the press conference. The government was running from the people. Furthermore, the press conference was not open to the public and the press outlets invited to attend were only

allowed to do so under strict guidance from the local government. It was, however, broadcast on the Internet. When officials emerged after the discussion, they announced that the PX project would be postponed until "a consensus among citizens is reached," a rather vague promise that certainly drew skepticism (Lee & Ho, 2014, p. 39). As of the time of the interviews (May 2015), as far as the interviewees were aware, construction on the project had not begun. The government was, perhaps, dragging their feet until opposition and awareness faded.

Renegotiating Relationships: Moving the Social

In the wake of these protests, of this *force majeure* that left a trail of images, injuries, and charred buildings, much needed to be renegotiated. The shifting of the social can be witnessed via these renegotiations. First and foremost, the local officials were forced to postpone plans for the plant indefinitely. This was a major defeat for local officials, who would lose the revenue and bonuses that came with what was to be a 3.5 billion yuan ($563m) paraxylene (PX) plant. Moreover, this plant was very much needed in China. By 2014, the massive PX shortage in China that was exacerbated by protests in places like Xiamen and Maoming forced the country to import over half the PX they use. Of the 16 million tonnes China used in 2014 as the world's largest consumer of the chemical compound, it had to import 9.5 million. Much of this PX is used in China's textile industry, which accounted for approximately 12% of the country's exports in 2014 (Chen, 2015a). This not only costs China money it could save by producing its own PX, but it also creates a dependence on other countries when China is working to be self sufficient. PX demand is growing globally and many large oil giants, including Exxon

Mobile, Chevron Phillips, and Honeywell, are building plants in India, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea in an attempt to increase supply.

The plant slated for Maoming was part of a larger petrochemical expansion project intended to make the city "a world-class petrochemical base. With an annual production capacity of 600,000 tons, the planned PX plant was obviously one of the fundamentals to achieve that goal" (Kai, Qing, & Mei, 2014, para. 20). The project, which was listed in the Chinese government's 12th Five Year Plan (2011-2015), was viewed as crucial to helping to produce enough product to meet the growing demand. Building a PX plant on the scale proposed for Maoming is a wise investment move because, due to infrastructure costs, building bigger plants means making PX cheaper. Since China is dealing in hundreds of thousands of tons of the chemical, savings add up quickly. Furthermore, the PX shortage has driven up the cost of PX as well as chemicals down the processing chain. In 2014, a chemical made from PX called PTA rose in price from about $800 per ton in late May to around $1,000 in August of that year (Sato, 2014).

Sinopec was slated to oversee Maoming's PX project, and as the second largest oil company in China, it is a formidable force. The company operates "as a state-authorized investment organization in which the state holds the controlling share" with a registered capital of RMB 231.6 billion ("About Us," 2014, para. 1). In 2014, Sinopec Group was ranked third in the Fortune Global 500 and in 2015 Sinopec ranked 24th on *Forbes* list of the world's 2,000 largest companies, second in sales, 60th in profit, and 56th in market value ("Sinopec on the Forbes Global 2000 List," 2015). This combination of size and affiliation to the state has allowed it to build and extend its investment in China and abroad. For example, after the PX plant in Zhangzhou built by the Xianglu Group (also

known as Dragon Aromatics) suffered a second explosion in early 2015, local authorities reportedly wanted "Sinopec to participate before allowing the plant to reopen" (Chen, 2015b, para. 2). Ostensibly, this $3 billion buyout was initiated to insure better safety, which is concerning news considering the lack of trust the local Chinese people have in Sinopec. This deal also will help Sinopec to expand while shrinking the assets of the competition. Furthermore, "the purchase could also allow Sinopec to increase its purchases of Iranian oil," which would allow the company to further expand globally (Chen, 2015b, para. 16). This is but one example of Sinopec's reach within and beyond China's borders.

This focus on Sinopec is to draw attention to the fact that the people in Maoming were battling not just a plant, but a global behemoth. Their success, even if temporary, warrants attention. The disruption to the plans for the PX plant reverberated out in many directions, forcing not only the local government to renegotiate with its largest benefactor, Sinopec, but also the central government to adjust its plans to expand PX in the following Five Year Plan. Without this plant, China's ability to reduce the PX shortage will be, once again, postponed, thereby leading to economic losses related to textile industries, plastic production, and the manufacturing of other chemicals further down on the processing chain. These are just a few potential impacts. The postponement or cancellation of the plans for the plant certainly will continue to splinter out in other directions. The aforementioned takeover of the Zhangzhou plant may be related to the troubles Sinopec faced in Maoming, especially since it could direct profits (now missing from Maoming) away from its Taiwanese owners back to China's state-owned enterprise.

In addition to these financial repercussions exists another major renegotiation

between the residents of Maoming and their government. If officials want to resume plans for the plant, they will have to take a very different path than they did initially. Rather than simply initiate a one-sided propaganda push, the local government will need to conduct an EIS, present it to the public, and hold a period of public comment during which local citizens will be given the opportunity to voice their opinions. Given citizens' deep seated mistrust of their officials, selecting a reputable independent company to conduct the EIS will be of the utmost importance if they are to convince the people of Maoming to support the project.

The relationship between the people and their government was and is fractured in ways that cannot be easily mended and evidences a shift in the social. Without faith in their officials to do what is best for the people, residents in cities across China are increasingly more likely to react with opposition to projects. Furthermore, as is the case in Maoming, even if the project has been proven to be "safe" in places like the U.S., people are extremely reticent to trust that their government will properly manage the projects, thereby transforming them into dangerous developments. Interviewees evidence a change in consciousness when they repeatedly expressed their complete and utter lack of trust in local officials when they, unprompted, said things like "We all know Maoming's government is seriously corrupt. We completely don't trust them" and "in terms of my trust in the government, it is very low, very low. You could say I have none" (Maoming interviewee 2, personal communication, 2015). Another participant said, "Of course I don't trust CCP officials. As for Maoming, we trust them even less. Maoming officials are more corrupt than officials elsewhere" (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015). This lack of trust became the major issue in protesting the plant,

"because management is key...it would be like having a ticking time bomb around.... Everybody has this kind of mentality. We don't have a lot of confidence in this project" (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). This lack of trust and widespread skepticism is a barrier that has been growing in Maoming for decades, and even the central authorities will not be able to dismantle it easily.

Part of the impetus for President Xi's war against corruption was to restore waning faith in political officials, but rather than increasing trust, the exposure of widespread corruption has, to a degree, increased *mis*trust. According to Lin Boqiang, an energy economist at Xiamen University, "the local governments' handling of Xiamen and Dalian's anti-PX campaign has set a very bad example" because

> The public does not know what level of pollution the project would cause and how acceptable the pollution level would be. They see Xiamen and Dalian rejecting PX projects and assume that other cities should not have them either. To halt the project whenever opposition emerges *only causes more distrust.* (as cited in Lin, 2014, para. 8, emphasis added)

In Lin's view, distrust has spread like a contagion because the local governments are implicitly agreeing with the people that PX is dangerous when they cancel plans. With each new protest, the belief PX is harmful is reinforced and builds, along with an unwavering distrust of any official who says otherwise. The people of Maoming had lost most of their faith in public officials due to guilty verdict after guilty verdict in corruption cases. Thus, when confronted with the government's proposal for a PX project, Maoming residents turned to wild public networks and quickly learned that people from across the country had opposed similar projects. Though the government led multiple information campaigns, they were, of course, going to face opposition from the people.

Ma Jun, the director of the ENGO Institute of Public and Environmental Affairs in

Beijing, agrees with Lin's assessment that distrust in officials is only increasing as the number of protests grows. However, he attributes the peoples' deep-seated suspicion not to the government's caving to public pressure, but to the exclusion of the public in the approval process for major projects, saying "the ice of three feet does not result from just one day of cold weather" (as cited in Lin, 2014, para. 9). The distrust in Maoming has been in the making for years, and the more people are excluded, the more exacerbated the problem will become.

An editorial published in *China Daily* bolstered this argument, maintaining that "For a local government, it is not a matter of just dissuading local residents from opposing the project, it is a matter of establishing their own trustworthiness among local residents," which is something Maoming was woefully lacking (*China Daily*, 2014, para. 5). The editorial goes on to state, "many residents believe that local governments choose to introduce polluting industries regardless of the cost to the environment and residents' health" and most governments lack "the awareness that transparency can be a way to reduce and dispel the mistrust between them and residents" (*China Daily*, 2014, paras. 6, 8). However, even if they were transparent, at this point, who in Maoming might listen?

The China Council for International Cooperation on Environment and Development (CCICED) (2013) found that

> Where public participation in environmental decision making is nonexistent or ineffective, public suspicion of development projects is high and levels of public trust tend to be low. In the absence of effective channels for public participation in environmental decision-making, and in the event of environmental incidents, citizen voices frequently find their outlet through protest. (p. 5)

Rebuilding trust is absolutely essential to governmental success. The report goes on to state: "Achieving an ecological civilization will require full public participation. Without

this, lasting environmental protection cannot be ensured, discontent will continue to grow and trust will not be restored" (CCICED, 2013, p. 1).

What the eruptions of protests have made clear is that the invasive and widespread corruption has damaged the relationship between people and the government, perhaps irreparably. The tax system that privileges corporations over people, the deeply embedded practice of bribery in local governments, and the shifting gap between officials and the people they ostensibly serve has created an environment in which mistrust, doubt, and skepticism flourish. Things will not change until officials and residents can work together to create an environment more conducive to cultivating a relationship predicated on openness, which will be difficult given the deeply rooted oil industry and tangled ties between it and local government.

However, the fact that these protests are occurring over and over again is testament to the claim that "environmental activism has provided citizens with more opportunities to exercise their rights" (Matsuzawa, 2012, p. 81). As was discussed in Chapter One, the people's right to protest is protected under the Chinese constitution, but permits are rarely, if ever, actually given, so the Chinese people exercise their right to oppose pollution via risky unsanctioned protest. When the citizens of Maoming marched to City Hall with signs and then through the streets where more people joined, they knew the potential to be beaten or imprisoned existed. They went anyway. As van Rooij (2010) explains in his research about the barriers Chinese people face in confronting pollution, knowledge of the harmful impacts of pollution "gradually turned them [the villagers] into activists" (p. 60), which is also happening in Maoming. As citizens turned activists, these "desperate pollution victims try every strategy available to them to get attention for their

cause" (van Rooij, 2010, p. 76). This shift in the notion of citizenship and possibilities for engagement brings me back to the impacts of these protests, of this *force majeure* that upended the order of things.

Moving Toward New Forms of Civic Engagement

After 9 days of protests, after 9 days marked by violence, after dozens of people were sent to jail, after clashes with outside police, after rumors ran rampant and censors tried to shut down wild public networks, after this and more, the government announced that plans for the plant would be postponed without support from the people. This was, indeed, an important achievement, but the repercussions of the protest pulsated beyond this "success"; the protests in Maoming set off protests in other cities, which were conducted in solidarity with Maoming. After people protested for several days in Maoming, smaller sister demonstrations were launched in Shenzhen and Guangzhou (D., 2014). Though remarkably smaller, approximately 200 people in Guangzhou and 20 people in Shenzhen gathered in the face of police presence and heavy rain to also demand that the PX plans for Maoming be scrapped and that the people in Maoming detained in the protests be released. The protestors in Shenzhen, who were all originally from Maoming, were arrested shortly after beginning their march and taken in for questioning before being released (He & Li, 2014). This movement of the protests outward helped to raise awareness of what was happening in Maoming by creating what DeLuca (1999) calls an "image event" in which people not only demonstrate, but then are arrested, which, in this case, helped to bolster disdain for authorities attempting to quash the protests. Pictures snapped of the protestors in Shenzhen being arrested were quickly

uploaded to social media, where they drew attention not only to the opposition in Maoming, but also to the fact that protestors across the area were being unfairly treated and prevented from expressing themselves.

Violence was a major force in the Maoming protests. The police beat protestors with billy clubs, threw tear gas into crowds, and announced into megaphones that the people gathered needed to "clear the field." Violent beatings drew others in to the fray, as was the case with the aforementioned protestor who yelled at police to get them to stop beating one of the younger protestors and was subsequently beaten. Images of police beating protestors are likely to incite anger, an emotion Fan et al. (2014) have found travels faster than other emotions on social media platforms like Weibo. Anger moves people to repost, comment, forward, and share, and the Maoming protests were replete with images of citizen and police clashes. The bloodiest images, which were found to be phony, flew the fastest, and these were the images that drew more onlookers to the protest sites and instigated people in surrounding cities to protest in solidarity.

Violence put a spotlight on Maoming and violence in the form of rumors (and valid documentation) forced a response from officials, who put out official statements to contest the legitimacy of the most violent images. Reports and images of violence drew the attention of Human Rights Watch, who investigated the protests. Human Rights Watch China Director, Sophie Richardson, made a public statement that "Accounts and photographs suggest that police may have used disproportionate force against demonstrators in Maoming.... Authorities should move swiftly to investigate these claims, and hold those responsible to account" (Human Rights Watch, 2014).

As is explicated by Harold and DeLuca (2005), violence acts as a potent rhetorical

force and bloody bodies a powerful text that can mobilize masses. As has been the case in protests in various locations, "symbolic violence and the uncivil disobedience [fulfill] the function of gaining the attention of the distracted media" (DeLuca et al., 2011, p. 151), and, I would add, distracted networks. The transformation from peaceful protestors to pulsating acts of violence and retaliatory acts of destruction communicated the gravity of the event and drew attention to what was at stake—lives. Violence, as a rhetorical force, does not exist as the counter, or opposite, of reason, and it should not be discarded or eschewed for not being "civil" (Stormer, 2013). Violence, like dissensus, is an important force in the movement of the social. Furthermore, violence/force is the essence of civil disobedience, of activism, of democracy. As Abel (1999) argues, "Violence is a force—or rather a multiplicity of different forces" that cannot be judged via a moral stance (p. 326). Violence forces people to think and rethink relationships.

Witness the Civil Rights protests in Birmingham during which violence against black bodies occurred and were documented (Johnson, 2007). Dogs ripped open pant legs and punctured the flesh of Black bodies. Images of violence such as these as well as violent images of "Emmett Till, provoked both affect and action because it demonstrated that conventional boundaries—between self and others, North and South, life and death—are irrevocably blurred" (Harold & DeLuca, 2005, p. 281). These violent images changed the way people conceptualized their relationships. More recently, images of Eric Garner being wrestled to the ground and suffocated by police in New York City appeared only months before images of Michael Brown's dead body lying in the streets of Ferguson, Missouri in 2014. These pictures of violence provoked affect and action in the form of violent protests that made evident racial tensions between White police officers and

Black bodies. I join DeLuca (2013) in arguing that, "In recognizing that violence imbues rhetoric, I conclude that rhetoric is not about good reasons but acts of force" (p. 230). Violence must be treated as a form of rhetoric that affects and moves in many ways across wild public networks. Violence is force.

Though violence played an important role in garnering support and attention for the protests, the interviewees saw the existence of violence as problematic. They were prone to judge it with a moral lens. For one interviewee, corruption "leads to more serious situations and can turn into lawless violence," as was the case in Maoming. For him, the protests would have been better and more successful "if there wasn't any violence. Violence makes casualties inevitable...violence will inevitably cause loss" in the form of revenue, injuries, and emotional trauma that results (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). Another participant adamantly insisted that the violence that occurred was not necessary, that she was unsatisfied with the outcome largely because the people caused violence by throwing bottles and the police by hitting people (Maoming interviewee 2, personal communication, 2015). This sentiment was echoed by yet another participant who stated that though violence is inescapable in such situations, "Using violence will definitely lead to worse results" (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015). In times of uprisings, it is the government that is framed as the entity wanting to keep the peace and promote harmony. Though this is a small sampling of protestors, some people involved in the movement were disappointed in the violence that occurred, regardless of its inevitability. Thus, one of the impacts was an aversion to violence and a preference for more civil forms of participation.

Another major impact of the protests was a general increase in environmental

awareness beyond PX. In the aftermath of the protests, people saw Maoming anew. For some people, it involved experiencing the air anew and realizing that the acrid smells they once simply dealt with became something people, "of course, should avoid" (Maoming interviewee 2, personal communication, 2015). Another person remarked that "before we never paid attention to air quality. . . . [now] when [the air quality] is worse, we reduce our outdoor activities" (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015). After the protests, one participant responded that "comparatively, now I am more conscientious about the environment" (Maoming interviewee 2, personal communication, 2015). Part of this is due to the fact that people are learning from others what can be done. A media representative remarked that "People are slowly becoming more environmentally aware. They are beginning to care about the environment in which they live" (Maoming interviewee 6, personal communication, 2015).

This shift to environmental awareness is important, but is just in its infancy. As 1 interviewee made clear, yes, the people opposed PX and took to streets, but cultivating a sense of environmental awareness must go much further than this. One interviewee discussed at length the trash problem in Maoming, which stems from people either not knowing how to sort their trash so it can be recycled or ignoring the information they have been given. Other problems proliferate in corporate sectors. For instance, companies will install the equipment necessary to treat wastewater or emissions, but they do not use them because the fines imposed cost companies less than actually operating the equipment. Maoming's NGOs are also rather weak, with no real presence politically or socially. In contrast to Xiamen, where Xiamen Green Cross (XGC) had been cultivating environmental awareness and encouraging participation for roughly 8 years when the PX

protests occurred there or Dalian, where Bo Xilai invested in greening the city, the Maoming people had no environmental organizations to turn to for support or information when they were confronted with similar plans.

While raising environmental awareness is an important achievement, each of the interviewees was more amazed by the changes this protest made in people's awareness of their rights and civic duty. This was Maoming's first major protest, and it created a shift in the way people expressed themselves, how they interacted with their government. "Before [this incident] people did not express their citizenship in this way" (Maoming interviewee 6, personal communication, 2015). After the protests, people realized that they could force their government to listen and act. "Most of the people stood up for themselves. It awakened people so they came to know their rights; they had a civic awakening" (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015). This was a major shift from before the protests occurred when "the Central government would hand down the documents, and it would just be implemented. At that time, this kind of situation [protest] could not have happened" (Maoming interviewee 6, personal communication, 2015). The protest as *force majeure* disrupted government processes and relationships, enabling citizens to reimagine new ways of interacting and shifting the social.

Part of the dispersed agency that drove these protests was fear for future generations. Maoming citizens "already live in a polluted environment, so I don't want our next generation to have to live under this kind of pollution" (Maoming interviewee 2, personal communication, 2015). Many people are, to varying degrees, aware that "It is written in the constitution that citizens have the right to assemble" (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015), but people rarely exercise this right because it is

accompanied by serious consequences. However, “A lot of people decided to go [to the protests] spontaneously. They knew Maoming wanted to construct this thing and were afraid that the pollution would be dangerous to future generations. Everyone...wanted to contribute” (Maoming interviewee 2, personal communication, 2015). Rather than staying at home, upwards of 20,000 people decided to participate; as 1 participant said, “I will participate as much as possible within the scope of my ability” (Maoming interviewee 1, personal communication, 2015).

This reflects an important change for many citizens, a reordering of their priorities in Guangdong, a province known for promoting unbridled growth and profit (the “Guangdong Model”). As 1 participant put it, “I think [Maoming’s protests] represent Maoming’s pride. Most Maoming residents ignore the things that do not affect them personally, as long as they make money, they don’t care.... In this case, unexpectedly, people went without regard to how it would impact them, personally” (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015). This marks a move away from the capitalist practices and corruption that have made financial gain the ultimate goal. This protest “invoked the people of Maoming’s awareness of their rights. It helped people who were under the Communist Party for decades and were deprived of their right to know to arouse their sense of citizenship”; after this event, he went on so say, even if the government decided to build the plant, this change cannot be erased (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015).

This brings me to my final point of this section, which is that this increase in civic engagement via environmental issues has also offered people an outlet by which to air their grievances regarding corruption. The people were not opposing the PX as much as

they were opposing the management of PX by their local officials and by Sinopec. This protest was just as much about protesting against corruption, if not more, than it was about protesting against PX. Allen-Ebrahimian (2014) describes the situation in Maoming as follows:

> For many grassroots observers, assurances of paraxylene's safety miss the point. Zhao Chu, a military affairs expert with over 1 million Weibo followers, wrote in a post that was later deleted by censors, "Whether or not PX is toxic is a scientific question, but to build a PX-producing factory is an issue of local public policy, and the people of that region have a natural right to speak, as well as the right to participate in the final decision." Another Weibo user complained, that the protest's "main cause" was not the plant itself, but an "arrogant approach" by government that "makes nothing public or transparent." (para. 8)

As was the case with Xiamen and Dalian, people protested against the plant for diverse reasons using all kinds of (mis)information. However, one of the major threads that is woven throughout the protests is a lack of trust in government officials and deep dissatisfaction with the ways in which they interact with the people—the lack of transparency, their unwillingness to follow protocol, their control over the mass media, the lack of dialogue with the public, their manipulation of information, and so on. The government has left people "in the dark" about their environment, and the protests offered them "an outlet to vent...mainly they [the people] want the opportunity to vent their emotions about the government" (Maoming interviewee 3, personal communication, 2015).

This is an important turning point for the protests in that dissatisfaction, anger, and resentment about years of corruption were expressed via opposition to a PX plant proposed by the 24th largest company in the world. PX, if handled properly, is not a particularly dangerous chemical, as the government information suggests (and exaggerates upon). The problem is that shortcuts, cost-saving measures, and sub-

contracting has often led to accidents, explosions, and environmental devastation in China. Chemical compounds combined with corruption can create ruin. These protests are, in part, about people engaging in new ways to follow through with a practice embedded in Chinese society—the restoration of the cosmic order. Confucian tradition dictates that the people must rebel when officials are misusing and abusing power. It is part of their civic duty to hold their governments responsible. They are doing so by utilizing, hijacking, circumventing, and operationalizing online networks over which force travels like wildfire. After a *force majeure* erupts, reordering is in order.

Conclusion

Eventually, Sinopec leaders were implicated in a corruption scandal, but not until after the 2014 protests. In April 2015, Wang Tianpu, president of Sinopec, stepped down from his position after it was announced that he was being investigated by China's Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (the committee that oversees corruption investigations) for various violations. This announcement has not slowed Sinopec's growth. In October 2015, Sinopec announced the completion of a joint project with BASF (the world's largest chemical producer)—a worldscale isononanol (INA) plant in Maoming Hi tech Industrial Development Zone. This project was just one project that resulted from a 50/50 partnership between the two companies that promises to bring about more projects. However, the changes in Maoming persist.

Looking back on the events that transpired, the social media saturated environment helped launch, grow, and sustain the movement long enough to capture the attention and compliance of officials who were forced, at least temporarily, to give up a project that

would greatly increase local revenue (and their own personal bonuses). According to Lee and Ho's (2014) research, many of the people who participated in the protest were deeply inspired by the perceived success of the 2007 Xiamen anti-PX protests as well as the victories that resulted from subsequent marches in other cities like Dalian and Ningbo.[i] They felt that if other cities could be successful, so too could Maoming. Peoples' panmediated environment helped news of corruption as well as the protests spread quickly—before censors could delete posts.

As the protests began, people sending invitations and information over Weibo, QZone, and Weixin helped to encourage more people to unite as did the circuitous marches through the streets that drew the attention of neighbors. Once the protests turned violent, the small snippets of information and images that flew from one account to another drew people from a wider circle and enticed people to see for themselves what was happening. The fragmented pieces of information were not enough to construct a full story and people arrived at the scene to investigate for themselves. The violent images, arguably, helped fuel further support from people not angered about PX, but angered about how the government was treating its citizens. Eventually, the protests spread to other nearby cities. The affective content moved people to move to the streets in polysensus. The government was forced to respond in ways contrary to its rehearsed practices.

Maoming's protests were punctuated by violence, and the affective force of violent images are what spread across social media feeds. An uncivil society was gathering to say no to pollution, no to corruption, no to violence, no to the Guangdong Model, and no to GDP. Dissent over the plant erupted and spurred the conflict in which people

demanded environmental justice. Police repeatedly retaliated against the crowds using tear gas and pepper spray. During the clashes, police reportedly beat some protestors with clubs, leaving many injured in the streets and hospital beds full of damaged bodies. People fought back by setting fire to vehicles and police outposts. Violence begat further violence and the force of violence forced change.

Arguably, the greatest success of the protests was raising awareness about people's rights and disrupting networks of corruption. For officials and industry management alike, Maoming was seen as a perfect home for the $563 million PX plant. First, PX is a petroleum derived chemical, which means that Sinopec would not have to transport the raw materials outside the city to make PX. Second, its coastal location and surrounding highway networks offered convenient means of transporting the chemical. Finally, it would help to relieve China's 9.5 million ton PX shortage (D., 2014), which has forced China to rely on imports to manufacture products made with the chemical. Thus, their declaration to suspend plans was a difficult decision for them to make, but the force of the protestors and the publicity of the event left them with no other option.

Together, corruption, lack of trust, a long history of oil, Xi's antigraft campaign, media buzz about corruption, and the two million stories about Xiamen's PX protest networked together on the Internet were important factors at play that coalesced to "authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit" protest (Latour, 2007, p. 72). Thousands of "small, seemingly insignificant acts" merged in what became a *force majeure* that further eroded trust between the people and their government.

The Maoming protests function as an example of how networks of environmental activism can be hijacked for other purposes, how these networks are wild and unruly, and

how wild public networks can contain and nurture diverse motivations. An image of a police officer joining in the protest serves as an example. Within the image lies a complex intersection of official representation and opposition to official edicts. Attached to the officer's state-owned vehicle is a sign that reads: "Oppose PX! PX get out of Maoming!" In the bottom right corner of the image sits a stamp identifying the image as one that circulated on Weibo before being picked up by national and international news outlets. The officer is unidentifiable, as viewers cannot even glimpse his full profile, which means those cracking down on dissenters would be less likely to identify him. The people in front of him are unfazed. Only those people behind him, the people in his wake, can see his statement of opposition.

His small, seemingly insignificant act is part of the *force majeure* that coalesced and upended everything, created new connections, and forced renegotiations. These changes come with no guarantee other than that new possibilities have been opened up, which are neither inherently good nor bad. Rebuilding citizen government relationships will require much work outside of protest. Research on how NGOs are helping to imagine and implement new practices will help to build on this research.

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[i] Though the case of Dalian is often perceived as a success because local officials said they would move the existing PX plant, the local government never actually shut down or moved the PX plants after the protest.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FORCE MAJEURE: UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA, SOCIAL MOVEMENTS, AND RHETORIC AS FORCE

This dissertation has focused on three dramatic events, or *forces majeure,* that upended the world for the people of Xiamen, Dalian, and Maoming. These events interrupted networks of corruption and forced renegotiations between the people and their officials. These protests do work outside of organizations, due process, and government systems that have immense rhetorical force precisely because they are able to disrupt overlapping structures of official law and networks of corruption. In cases as dire as the one that China is facing environmentally, these kinds of eruptions may be necessary to force certain changes. Frustrated with the ineffectiveness of the systems in place, people have taken to networks of screens and streets. One of the outcomes is a significant shift in the notion of civic engagement, which has the potential to lead to alternative systems of governance.

I argue, however, that scholars are often too quick to rename this new form of governance, which is constantly changing. This is evident in the work of scholars who study China's changing political and social terrain. Scholars such as Yang and Calhoun (2007) call what they saw as China's new emerging governmental system "the green public sphere." MacKinnon (2011) labels what she witnesses "networked

authoritarianism," and Teets (2013) terms it "consultative authoritarianism." These terms are helpful in tracing the movement of the social, but to implicitly or explicitly assume that China, which is a country that spans a vast amount of space and is home to 1.35 billion people, has adopted a singular new form of governance is to curtail conversations. China is *changing* and *moving,* not stopping.

Yang and Calhoun (2007) look to proliferating environmental discourses, or "greenspeak," in China to map the changes occurring to China's system of governance. These discourses occur over mass media, on the Internet, and via alternative media and can include everything from greenwashing campaigns to Friends of Nature's website. The point is that people are talking about the environment and spaces like the Internet have provided a platform for people to engage in conversation and debate. As a result, they argue, a green public sphere has emerged that "fosters political debates and pluralistic views about environmental issues, and for this reason it is intrinsically valuable" (p. 212). In 2007, Yang and Calhoun saw this conversation as largely driven by ENGOs. Since then, the conversations have continued to flourish over wild public networks, which have allowed people to organize on their own, collect information among the vast jungle of rumors and opinions, and challenge the government in the streets. China's political and social topography have changed.

MacKinnon problematizes Yang and Calhoun's (2007) piece as well as Yang's later work, which focuses on the connection between environmental activism and democracy by asserting that "rising levels of online activism in China cannot automatically be interpreted as a sign of impending democratization" (p. 35). MacKinnon's concept of networked authoritarianism stems from the introduction and adoption of the Internet by

the Chinese people *and* their government. In this

> networked authoritarian state, the single ruling party remains in control while a wide range of conversations about the country's problems nonetheless occurs on websites and social-networking services.... As a result, the average person with Internet or mobile access has a much greater sense of freedom. (MacKinnon, 2011, p. 33)

In this piece, MacKinnon takes a cybercynic approach, arguing that Internet networks have the potential to further oppress the people and give them a false sense of freedom and hope. Policy and legislative work, she argues, "are more important than ever" (MacKinnon, 2011, p. 44). This stance, however, lacks complexity.

Teets sits apart from Yang and MacKinnon. She comes to her concept of "networked authoritarianism" by examining civil organizations in Beijing and how they have cultivated "a new model of state–society relationship...that encourages the simultaneous expansion of a fairly autonomous civil society and the development of indirect tools of state control" (2013, p. 20). Her study, which is based on over a hundred interviews, helps to elaborate upon how citizens and state representatives are working in conversation rather than simply vying for control. This study offers a nice counter to MacKinnon's because it is grounded in the realization that the people and their government are in a relationship that is not unilaterally contentious. The people are interested in working *with* their government. As was discussed in Chapter Five in the case study on Dalian, tracing changing *relationships* between the people and the government is a far more productive way to understand how changes are occurring than framing the interactions as two sided. Furthermore, Teets makes clear that "the expansion of civil society in China is not leading to a process of democratization but rather to better governance under the conditions of authoritarianism, which in turn is increasing citizen satisfaction with the regime" (Teets, 2013, pp. 20–21).

Evidence of this change is apparent in forthcoming scholarship. Balla and Wu recently presented their findings at the Chinese Internet Research Conference (CIRC) 2015 in Alberta, Canada. After looking at local government websites in China, they found that government officials are using the Internet to not only gauge public opinion, but also solicit input. They argue that online consultation has become "a prominent instrument of governance reform in which officials provide interested parties with opportunities to offer feedback on proposed public policies" (2015, p. 1). Though this tends not to be used by central authorities, over two thirds of provincial governments have initiated online consultations. This may mean that some provincial governments are working to increase transparency one step at a time.

Together, this research shows that shifts are already occurring and—though the government may not make a major shift in the name of its governance nor may it change from the top down—as a result of decentralization, these changes are happening at the local level. This means that China may continue to develop localized forms of governance that vary across the country and that take into consideration local needs and variances. One thing is certain: change is still occurring. China's governmental shifts are very much in process and cannot yet be named.

China's Environmental Movement Writ Large

As is evident in the descriptions of these different forms of governance, NGOs and citizen groups are helping to alter notions and enactments of civic engagement. Though I have focused on protests in this dissertation for several reasons, they are but one aspect of China's environmentally driven movement. Networks of ENGOs also overlap with

ephemeral eruptions of protestors, environmental documentary makers help to stir affective winds that compel mothers to fight for their children, and environmental artists coping with rapid change and rabid consumption intersect with journalists dedicated to forwarding an environmental agenda. The networks of environmental activism are vibrating, pulsating, and expanding. Protests are one part of complicated assemblages.

Environmentalist activity also extends far beyond such overt activism. In the introduction, I related stories about two of my friends from two very different parts of China whose familial networks were disrupted by pollution and the cancers it caused. One could read their stories and label the people "victims." However, in both cases, the disruption of their networks changed their relationships with their careers. The student diagnosed with throat cancer used his degree to pursue a career as a journalist, which would allow him to report on issues that could influence public opinion. My friend from southern China shifted his studies to environmental activism and is currently working closely with ENGOs to write a manual that will help emerging and established ENGOs navigate the new policies the Chinese government has put in place to make their work more effective.

The networks are further altered in subtle ways. Over the course of my conversations with protestors, I witnessed them change just by telling their story. At the end of interviews, they were thanking me for doing the research and telling me how important it was. They wanted to help—especially the people of Dalian who felt disappointed by the outcome of their protests—and knew that academic work could potentially disrupt and shift networks in a way that would help create safer living environments. As events, as *forces majeure,* the protests in Dalian left local communities upended and lacking any

system that could help ensure that their government followed through with promises to close the PX plants. Thus, some were still searching for ways to fully realize the outcomes of their risky forms of protest.

Despite this work, the future of China's environment remains uncertain. Those who are watching are witnessing a great deal of conflicting information colliding regarding NGOs, nationalism, and Internet laws. For example, in 2015, the central government released the second draft of a law concerning "Managing Foreign NGOs." This law requires foreign NGOs, many of which operate under the radar in China, to register formally with the Chinese government. It also places them under the purview of Public Security Departments, which is an entirely different branch than domestic organizations (domestic NGOs are regulated by the Ministry of Civil Affairs). This move grants "these [State] organs broad powers to control [international] NGOs' personnel decisions, programs, and grantmaking, even giving them apparently unrestricted access to the organizations' computers and bank accounts" (Editors, 2015, para. 1). If passed, this law also will make procuring international funding more difficult for Chinese NGOs by placing a variety of restrictions on funding and will make collaborating with foreign NGOs more difficult for domestic partners. Some have interpreted this law as hostile toward civil society (Genser & Kuperminc, 2015).

However, also in 2015, the central government gave NGOs the ability to sue industries over pollution violations, as was previously discussed. This was exciting news for ENGOs like Greenovation Hub, who saw it as a step forward for NGOs because the government was increasingly cooperating with ENGOs in China by holding conferences to which both registered and unregistered organizations were invited. As a result of the

most recent conference, ENGOs were conducting research to inform national policies. The law giving NGOs the right to sue was monumental for environmental organizations because it not only gave them important legal rights, but it also further validated their importance, their value, and their standing in the community at large. NGOs quickly began taking advantage of their new right. According to *China Daily,* in March of 2015, the NGO All-China Environment Federation filed a lawsuit against the Dezhou Jinghua Group for damages related to the air pollution they were discharging into that atmosphere. This was the first, but not the last lawsuit an NGO would file.

These two legal actions—a proposed law to invasively regulate international NGOs and a law stating that NGOs can sue polluting industries—impact the networks of NGOs in myriad different ways. They impact relationships, collaborative opportunities, tensions between NGOs and businesses, and interrupt the pathways of funding so crucial for NGOs to continue their work; however, this is what NGOs in China are facing and they must navigate this complicated terrain. This is not the only contradiction playing out in Chinese politics.

As was explored in Chapter Three, nationalism is being simultaneously coopted by the central government and activists for very different purposes. Whereas NGO leaders, protestors, and environmental documentary makers are all answering the call to put the greater good ahead of oneself in order to better the environment and ensure a safe living space for their children (civic duty), government authorities are using nationalism to encourage blind devotion to one's country. They are stirring up feelings of shame to encourage allegiance to the nation. Both are working. These variations have created conflict, fear, and concern for government officials who want to direct how people

sacrifice for the common good as well as the definition of "common good."

Finally (and importantly for this dissertation), conflicting information regarding Internet policies abounds. The Constitution declares that people have civil rights and that they should be allowed to critique and criticize their government. People have taken to the Internet to exercise this right. Censorship has been deployed consistently. However, harsh critiques, at times, are tolerated. Knowing when a critique of the government will result in an invitation to tea (a euphemism for a meeting with government officials regarding a person's behavior or actions) is difficult to predict and always in flux. The rules and tactics to prevent mass uprisings are always changing. As scholars have watched the government react and analyzed the data they have gathered, what has come to light is that the Chinese government recognizes the potential for outrage to be organized over networks. This is evident in King, Pan, and Roberts' (2013) research, which demonstrates that, if a user posts a scathing critique of officials, it is not likely to be censored unless it gains momentum and begins drawing too much attention in the form of views and comments online. Then it disappears.

The year that the King et al. research was published, the Chinese government passed a law aimed at preventing online rumors. This was a valid concern after rumors of PX ignited protests in Xiamen, Dalian, Shifang, and other cities after proliferating across social media platforms. The law stated that "people will be charged with defamation if online rumours they create are visited by 5,000 internet users or reposted more than 500 times" on social media (Kaiman, 2013c, para. 3). The vagueness of the law allowed officials to interpret it in multiple ways, thereby creating concern. The punishments include fines as well as jail time. People shuddered, but protests continued.

In 2015, the government again announced a law that drew ridicule in international circles—they banned puns, claiming that they could mislead the public, especially children. Though this appeared to be both nonsensical and an extreme exercise of control over the Chinese people, I argue that its enactment was likely linked to the use of puns to avoid censorship. The Chinese language lends itself to wordplay, as words depend upon tones to convey meaning. Thus, many characters exist for a given sound. If one word is banned, users insert a homonym. If one phrase is banned, netizens develop a new playful one that often mocks or mimics whatever phrase the authorities have banned. By creating a law that can be variously interpreted, it offers officials space to bend it in whatever way they deem appropriate. People can be punished for anything officials deem to be pun use.

Free speech is supposed to be a right for Chinese people, one interviewee remarked, but this freedom is often taken away. This is clear in the widespread censorship that occurs in China, the jailing of dissidents, and the aforementioned laws that seek to direct conversations. This is what MacKinnon (2011) addresses in her work. People are very aware of censorship in China. It is not hidden. However, in December of 2015, President Xi Jinping addressed the Chinese people and told them they should have the right to speak their minds on the Internet. He told those gathered and those listening from afar that, "We should respect internet users' rights to exchange ideas and express their minds and we should also build good order in cyberspace in accordance with [the] law as it will help protect the legitimate rights and interests of all internet users" (as cited in Phillips, 2015b, para. 4). Xi says "yes" to free speech, but only in the context of "good order." By publicly addressing people and promoting the value of free speech, Xi is both legitimizing the importance of free speech and attempting to redefine it. Freedoms always

are circumscribed by restrictions and, in this case, the restriction is "order."

What the government meant by *order* became apparent soon after Xi's address. Just weeks after this speech, the Cyberspace Administration of China announced that its goal for 2016 was to make the Communist Party, "the strongest voice in cyberspace" (Hua, 2016, para. 1). According to *People's Daily,* the CPC wants to improve cyberspace by increasing governance, deepening online propaganda, and "creating a public opinion climate to enable victory in the creation of a society of comprehensive moderate wealth" (as cited in Bandurski, 2016, para. 12). In short, the government is seeking to control the Internet further as a means to increase national security and economic growth, which is written into China's 13th Five Year Plan. At the same time it is making effort to control the Internet, the government is seeking to expand it. By 2020, China plans to invest two trillion yuan (U.S.$323 billion) to upgrade its national broadband and 4G capabilities in order to provide Internet access to its entire population (Livingston, 2016).

Looking at all of these seemingly contradictory messages, edicts, and policies, what we witness is something far from order. Local governments and the central government are, in many ways, operating separately, which can simultaneously increase transparency and polluting practices. People feel a sense of nationalism that can, at once, incite anti-Japanese protests in the streets and drive others to establish an NGO. Online communication is tangled and cacophonous, riddled with censorship, and always shifting to adapt.

Much research is yet to be done that further identifies and investigates assemblages that overlap to foment environmental protection. Since China is in a constant state of rapid change, the job of tracing—whether that be policy, media, law, civic duty,

corruption, and so on—is never done. Whereas NGOs once were the main driver of the Chinese environmental movement, the people and their protests have also become an important force. Others are joining in and developing new methods to make a difference. One of the biggest challenges the environmental movement faces is the same thing that drives the protests—rumors and exaggerations. Finding transparency and disseminating accurate information, however, can only occur once trust between the people and their leaders is cultivated. Wild public networks are always shifting, but their growth is unpredictable.

Contributing Complexities

By analyzing protests in China, I have contributed to communication scholarship on 1) social movements, 2) media studies, and 3) rhetoric. By turning to China, I have moved social movement scholarship outside of democratic countries where the right to protest is not guaranteed. In China, protestors must contend with censorship, political regulations, and risky forms of protest that require creative forms of activism. As the U.S. and other countries increase levels of surveillance and adopt censorship practices (i.e., the NSA's widespread collection of data), this scholarship can provide alternative frameworks for analyzing protest. In addition to shedding light on China, this research offers a mirror by which scholars can see protests in their own country anew.

Looking to China, I develop a new theory of protests as *forces majeure*, which can also be used in studying movements including Occupy Wall Street and Black Lives Matter because it takes seriously social media networks, the agency of nonhuman objects, and privileges movement. The concept of *force majeure* as I have applied it to social

movements 1) argues for a rethinking of protest as a coalescing of forces over networks, 2) displaces individual agency in favor of dispersed agency that acknowledges nonhuman actants, and 3) traces the movement of the social outside the instrumental success paradigm.

In advancing a theory of protests as *forces majeure*, I am deliberately moving away from formulaic definitions of protest to embrace protest as the culmination of many factors, including both rational and affective forces, reason and violence, information and rumors. To do this, I take a networked approach that allows me to examine overlapping assemblages of actors and factors that make possible large scale protest. This approach, necessarily, moves scholars from studying protestors as a unified group of actors with individual agency to thinking of new media, political systems, and economic changes as creating possibilities for certain forms of protest and precluding others. In the case of China, protests must be decentralized and organized over networks. They occur on a terrain linked by wild public networks that include humans, phones, tainted fish, real estate, and political conferences.

Taking a networked approach also offers space to consider protests outside of instrumental successes and failures. The repercussions of a *force majeure* cannot be mapped within such a limited framework. As has been made evident in the case of Dalian, an instrumental failure does not mean that the protests as *forces majeure* failed to move the social. Protests as *forces majeure* ask scholars to consider changes in relationships, changes in human consciousness, and renegotiations. The social movement that occurred in Dalian (and in the instrumental successes of Maoming and Xiamen) extends well beyond whether the PX plant was shut down. It opened up new forms of

civic engagement and altered relationships between people, the government, industry, and the land. By taking seriously McGee's (1980) call to map the movement of the social, I am extending his work by not only mapping changes in human consciousness, but also changing relationships between actants.

This dissertation functions to advance media studies scholarship by considering how social media function differently in international contexts. Since people in China primarily use social media platforms outside Facebook and Twitter, studying social media in China helps to make evident the limits of Facebook and Twitter while also illustrating new possibilities for social media by showcasing Weibo and Weixin (which are often multiple steps ahead of U.S. based platforms in terms of functionality). My most important contribution to media studies, however, lies in the concept I put forth of wild public networks, which 1) acknowledges both the barriers to communication in surveillance societies and the creativity used to circumvent such barriers, 2) emphasizes the importance of relationships and connections, 3) further functions to weave together online and offline networks—the screens and streets—instead of separating them, and 4) illustrates how social media and social movements have become inextricably intertwined.

First, looking to China to trace the wildness of networks helps scholars to see how surveillance and censorship fail in the face of creative users. Though China is conceptualized as a restricted Internet society in mainstream U.S. media, the case studies in China I have discussed in this dissertation make evident that China's Internet is wild and unruly. The proliferation of platforms and practices offer space for circumvention and play, and government attempts to control users are sometimes no match for the wildness of 650 million people using the Internet. Second, this dissertation helps to make

evident that rhizomatic relationships that form wild public networks deserve sustained attention because they are essential to transmitting forces, information, and outrage. Their tangled overlapping nature offers users opportunities to hijack networks for activist purposes. As is evident in the case studies, as citizens lose trust in their government officials, they turn to different networks—wild public networks—to gather information and cull support for social movements. Third, wild public networks acknowledge that online and offline worlds are never separate but always mixed and moving. Information and outrage move from screens to streets back to screens in the form of images, text, and voice messages. This movement is evident in each of the case studies in that newspaper articles appeared on blogs, (mis)information was sent via text messages, and images of past protests inspired future ones. Online and offline networks simply cannot be separated. Movement flows across networks. This leads to next point—that social movements and social media are unable to be separated. Though the role of social media in social movements is often debated in the U.S., when we look to China, we can see that social movements would be impossible without social media. As is apparent in the case studies, the people are increasingly wary of their government and state sanctioned media, which has led people to turn to social media for information. This research can add insight into U.S. studies of social media and protest. With declining levels of trust in the news media in the U.S., people are looking elsewhere to find information, and the force of rumors and misinformation must be considered alongside rational arguments and reputable data.

Finally, this research contributes to the study of rhetoric by 1) complicating the recent turn to affect and 2) expanding on existing research that conceptualizes rhetoric as force.

This dissertation seeks to acknowledge the importance of affect via violence, violent images, rumors, and appeals to nationalism and civic duty. In each case study, I carefully examine the impacts of inflammatory text messages, police brutality, and rumors in moving people to act. However, I am also careful to make the point that rational and affective appeals often exist side by side, as was the case with Lian Yue's blog posts that offered information about PX while also telling readers that if they did not act, they would be considered "weak and dimwitted," for "rationality is inextricably entwined with emotions, forces, violences, and any number of 'alien' components" (DeLuca, 2013, p. 231). To polarize rationality and affect as opposites creates a false binary that can limit thinking. To consider them as intertwined helps to acknowledge the multiple forces at play.

This move depends upon the advancement of my second contribution, which is to conceptualize rhetoric as a force that moves—people, information, rumors, and affect—which has been taken up by authors such as Abel (1999), DeLuca (1999, 2011, 2013, 2016), Reyes (2004), and Sillars (1964). This move, which can be seen as stemming out of social movement scholarship as explained in Chapter Two, allows rhetoricians to contemplate that which lies outside of rationality as rhetoric, including photos, videos, inflammatory text messages, and violence. DeLuca (2013) is most explicit in his argument when he writes, "Rhetoric is force. The rhetorician's task is to understand and deploy forces that transform worlds amidst the cataclysms of our times" (p. 231). This dissertation is a tracing of force over wild public networks.

Ultimately, what I hope to help readers witness through this dissertation is the volatility, chaotic nature, and rapid growth of wild public networks and the concept of

protest as *force majeure*. Wild public networks respond well to creativity and usage but are impossible to control. Wild public networks are pregnant with possibilities and unpredictable mutations, including *forces majeure*. They are not relegated for use for a single purpose. They are used by many different actants simultaneously. They can erupt at any time and leave change in their wake. They are characterized by constant movement and change. The duty of scholars is to continue to map that change. This dissertation is one beginning.

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